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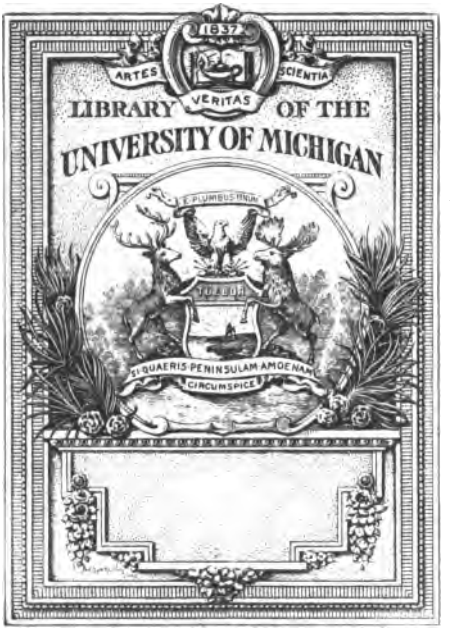
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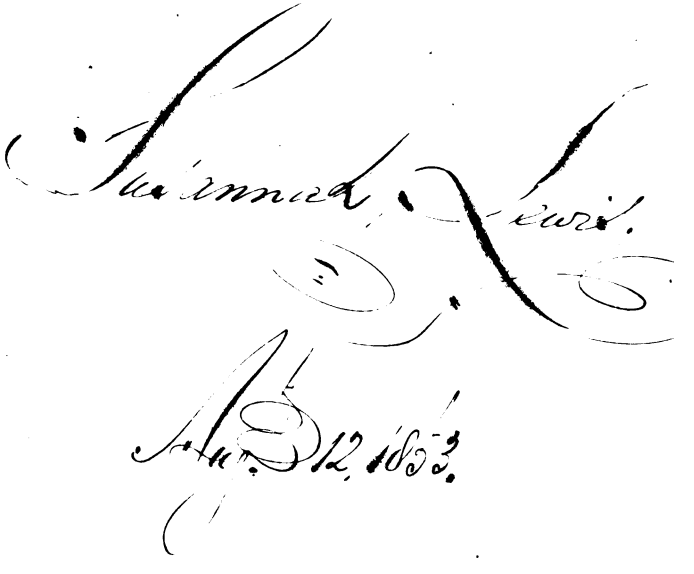

Aveling, Thomas William Baxter

NAAMAN;

OR,

Life's Shadows and Sunshine.

BY

REV. T. W. AVELING.

LONDON:
JOHN SNOW, PATERNOSTER ROW.
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PREFACE.

It has been customary for many years past, for several ministers who reside in the locality where the author is permitted to labour, to deliver a course of Lectures on some great doctrinal or practical subject, at the commencement of the New Year. Each Lecture is always delivered at precisely the same time, in the several places of worship; an arrangement that serves to show,—what is a truthful and pleasing reality,—the cordial oneness of mind, and, as far as is possible, unanimity of action that characterize the brethren whom the providence of God has brought together within a limited circle. The happy

results of these special efforts have been unmistakeably apparent, in numbers being brought to the house of God who never entered before, and who have been savingly converted to the faith.

The subject chosen for the present year was that which is presented in the following pages. It was thought,—and of the propriety of such thought the reader will be able to form a judgment, from a perusal of the following pages—that the interesting narrative of the Syrian captain might be made available for the presentation and enforcement of some vital spiritual truths, that, to say the least, are *illustrated* by it; and it was believed that to the general mind, ever fond of analogies, and to a great extent taught by them, such a mode of instruction would be likely to prove attractive and beneficial. So far as regarded the *hearing* of the lectures, the hopes and desires cherished were most abundantly realized, in the large numbers that listened to them. And now,

with the desire of making them, if possible, more widely useful than the limited range of the pulpit allows, they are printed and sent forth to the world.

At first the author thought of re-casting the whole into another form; but the fact that as lectures they had been originally announced, prepared, and delivered, and that as such many who heard them would expect to read them, and the feeble state of his own health, which forbade too much extra mental exertion, deterred him from this step. They therefore appear as discourses *delivered;* and the hortatory style characteristic of part of all such public exercises is in many places retained; especially at the close of the last two lectures.

Earnestly praying that they may be honoured in instructing men how they may effect the removal of the spiritual leprosy from their souls; in chasing away the darkest shadow that can cross the path of sorrowing humanity, and opening up for them broad glades of

glorious sunshine, where the smile of the divine favour shall greet them and gladden their souls, the author commends his book to his readers, and asks on them and on it the rich benediction of God.

Stoke Newington, May 1*st*, 1853.

NAAMAN;

OR,

LIFE'S SHADOWS AND SUNSHINE.

LECTURE I.

THE SHADOW ON EVERY PATH; OR, NAAMAN A GREAT MAN BUT A LEPER.

2 KINGS v. 1, 2.

ABOUT five years ago, it was my privilege, in company with some intelligent Christian friends, to visit one of the most glorious regions on the face of the earth — the country of Switzerland, and the northern parts of the kingdom of Sardinia, lying in the immediate neighbourhood of the Savoy Alps.

We were one day in the midst of a vast amphitheatre of mountains, the lofty peaks of which were glowing with an indescribably soft and rosy light, as if a thin, transparent fire-cloud had embraced them; while lower down the rugged rocks were presenting the most fan-

tastic and varied appearances, heaped together in a perfectly bewildering confusion; some showing the seams and scars of a thousand winter storms, and others bristling with forests of pines, but all of them clothed with a wild and enchanting beauty. Around us were the fields and gardens of a cultivated Swiss valley, with groves and chalets interspersed; and in the midst of all a narrow river wound its rapid course, revealing its existence by the rows of trees that adorned its banks, and the rich verdure that extended for some distance on either side of the stream. Mont Blanc reared his giant-like and majestic form before us, wearing his glorious coronet of glittering snow, white as a seraph's wing; the body of the mountain girded by belts of glaciers, gaping here and there in dreadful clefts, whose depths no plummet had ever sounded, and where neither sunlight nor summer-wind had ever strayed. The monarch of mountains awed us as we gazed upon him, with his aspect of terrific grandeur; and yet he fascinated and enchained us, attracting every eye with the splendours of "the terrible crystal" that seemed to rest on the bosom of the deep blue and serene sky, and silently kindling in the quick-beating heart a host of sensa-

tions, that, once felt, can never be forgotten. There was a rich commingling of the sublime and the beautiful; and the rush of the varied emotions of wonder, admiration, awe, delight, was most overpowering—most exquisite.

At that moment a harsh voice broke on our ears, and, turning from the contemplation of that magnificent scene, we saw standing by the side of the char-a-banc a cretin,—one of the unfortunate idiots that abound in that region, —who, with uncouth grimaces and offensive pertinacity, demanded our attention and laid claim to our sympathy. The revulsion of feeling which this incident produced was most intensely painful. Around us was nature in her most marvellous forms and aspects; each valley and ravine a picture of quiet and sombre beauty; each mountain-summit, flashing here and there with silver snows, a throne where grandeur and sublimity reigned; but amid these wondrous scenes that filled the vision, and whose solemn influence stole silently and imperceptibly into the soul, lifting it up into the region of the pure and the perfect, was an object the most affecting and painful it is possible to behold—the wreck of an intelligent mind —poor, smitten humanity in ruins. It was to

us, though we were but passing travellers, the shadow on our path, clothing our spirits with a temporary gloom, on that day of otherwise almost unclouded brightness. We recognized and felt, even while we shuddered, that though many links had been broken of the chain that bound that miserable object to our common nature, still it belonged to the great human family, and claimed a similar relationship to ourselves with the divine Father; and with silent thanksgivings for the precious boon which we possessed, and of which the poor cretin was so sadly destitute, we pursued our way.

Human life is not unlike that day's journey —a chequered scene, where the brightness and the gloom cross and re-cross each other; the streams of sorrow flowing by the side of those of joy, and sometimes, for a moment, strangely mingling their different currents; an April day, made up of sunshine and showers.

Although the subject of this lecture is a sombre one, and the very title itself suggestive of gloom, yet it is not with the design of merely producing melancholy reflections, still less of exciting or ministering to a sickly sentimentalism, or leading you to depreciate the true value of life, that I have selected it. But here

is a fact which we do well to contemplate—there is a shadow on every path, and there is a discoverable cause. Now, a right understanding of this,—which every one does not possess,—will enable us to meet certain inevitable occurrences aright. If I lead you for awhile with me, down to the depths of the gloomy valley that lies before us, it will be because through it lies the way to the delectable mountains beyond, where everlasting sunshine reposes, and the shadows of sorrow and of night for ever vanish away.

I have chosen this scripturally preserved fragment of the history of Naaman the Syrian for our meditation, because I think there will be found, within the briefly recorded yet striking incidents that are here set before us, illustrations of some of the most important truths that relate to man's present and eternal welfare. In my remarks, I shall interweave along with references to the various portions of his history, found in the solitary chapter that speaks of him, such reflections as appear appropriate thereto, and are for the most part suggested by the facts that are presented to our notice.

The words with which the chapter commences

are very striking; evidently selected with care by the sacred writer, for the purpose of showing, by a startling contrast, the really painful and degraded position of the Syrian noble. "Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, *but he was a leper.*"

How the sentences seem to swell with the enunciations of Naaman's greatness! They remind us of a herald proclaiming the style and titles of a mighty prince. But when the climax appeared to be near, how sudden the transition from the sentence that sets before us the successful warrior to that which places him before us in the lowest depths of humiliation! How strong the revulsion of feeling produced! It seems as if all that had been said previously of his greatness was intended only to make his calamity look the more dark; the last sentence of this verse being a terrible foil to all that preceded it; its gloomy aspect darkening and overshadowing all the sunshine that had gone before.

Naaman is represented as high in rank and station; a great favourite with his master, who

deservedly esteemed him, as a brave and intrepid soldier, by whom the arms of Syria had been made triumphant in many a field. He occupied a position at the court of Benhadad which was at once honourable and influential; apparently second to none but the King. Wealth, rank, honours, fame; the confidence of his master, and the applauses of a warlike nation, ever ready to idolize military genius, were doubtless his; so that amid the courtiers of the king he stood pre-eminent; flattered, fawned upon, and obsequiously obeyed. As a natural concomitant of all this prosperity, no doubt, there were some who envied him for his attainments, advantages, and position. By those who were unacquainted with the existence of that disease which flung a dark cloud over every day's sunniest hours, and who judged of things according to their mere holiday aspect, there might be the reflection, "How exalted this man's position! how happy his lot! prosperity seems to have set her seal upon him, and fortune to have selected him for her favourite son, and crowned him with her choicest royal favours."

But why, amid all the homage he receives, and all the splendour that encircles him, is that

dark shadow so often seen stealing over his brow? Why does he appear so abstracted amid the crowds that throng in his path, and greet him so joyously, as he rides amid the street-groves of Damascus? Why fade the gorgeousness and grandeur of his master's court before his eyes, as if it were vacancy on which he gazed. Alas! the terrible truth is present to his mind, startling as the mystic hand that came forth before the hushed and awe-stricken guests at Belshazzar's banquet, writing upon the monarch's palace walls the sentence of his approaching and inevitable doom. *Naaman is a leper;* and he feels this sad truth to the lowest depths of his soul; and sickens at the painful and humiliating thought.

This disease was one foul and polluting, and incurable by human skill. It was regarded as a divine infliction by the Jews, a visible sign of God's displeasure with him who was its victim, or with some one of his ancestors. We have no evidence however that this opinion was prevalent among the Syrians. According to the Levitical law, the leper was separated from the rest of society, enduring a perfect isolation of existence, with the exception of the company of others similarly afflicted with

himself. "And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean. All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be."* Even those high in station or connexions, as Miriam (Numb. xii. 10), and Uzziah (2 Chron. xxvi. 21), were thus separated from their fellow creatures. Naaman, however, was not so dealt with by his sovereign or the people; probably the leprosy might not be regarded by the Syrians with that intense dislike which, among the Jews, was perpetuated and strengthened by the religious aspect in which it was placed before them in the law of Moses.

The possession of this disease, as we have already hinted, must have afflicted Naaman keenly, have embittered every domestic enjoyment, and wreathed sharp thorns among his public laurels. He seemed marked out as the sport of a wayward fate; at one and the same time the most envied man in Benhadad's dominions, and yet the most pitiable and miserable

* Lev. xiii. 45, 46.

of all his subjects, the meanest of whom in station and influence would not exchange places with him. In that city of Paradise—as Mahomet in after days called Damascus — the Syrian captain felt as though a serpent had wreathed its loathsome and deadly coils around him, from which all the efforts he made were of no avail to extricate himself. Hope, perhaps, by that time, had ceased to buoy up his spirit, and, bowed down by what appeared an inescapable evil, he most probably schooled his heart into submissiveness—into a quiet and passive endurance of what he could not avoid. Yet often, we may believe, the tempest of excited feeling would be roused by continually recurring events, which would remind him most painfully of his afflicted condition—one in such dark and striking contrast with that of thousands less high-born and successful among the sons of men. His honours, though many, and deservedly bestowed, were worn over a heart where often gnawed a consuming worm.

Now, in this sad and humiliating position of Naaman, we see a striking illustration of the case of universal humanity. All men, small or great, ignoble or renowned, revelling in riches or pining in poverty, find a shadow on

their path that makes the heart sad; a sadness from which no earthly power can free them, and which no loving care or watchful tenderness can ever avert. This shadow dims the otherwise dazzling splendour of wealth; and robs prosperity of the capacity to satisfy or gladden the soul; while on the dark scenes of worldly misery and want it flings a more baleful and wretched gloom—for it turns not from the humblest any more than the highest. The storm-wind sweeps alike over the neglected thistle of the wilderness, and the flowers of the well-cultivated garden; and is as ready to rifle the former of its unvalued down, as the latter of their rich and highly-prized bloom.

Men may be wealthy, intelligent, amiable, generous; beloved by friends for their inward worth, and admired by acquaintances for their visible excellencies; everything around them may appear to contribute to their enjoyment, and their path seem to lie through the brightest and happiest of earthly scenes; and yet, could we read the secrets of their breast, it would be found that they too have their sorrows, and probably, some of them deep and agonizing. The millionaire, who rolls by in his voluptuous chariot, may carry along with him a heart

wasting with griefs, and may be in circumstances so intensely painful,—and they may arise from his peculiar position—that he envies the poorest beggar whom he bespatters with his chariot wheels. Few beyond the home circle know what pains the hearts that beat within that hallowed enclosure; sickness perpetuated through a long succession of months and years, sorrows that, in force and severity, accumulate as time rolls on. There is a happy ignorance among others of the bitter mortifications, the ever-recurring anxieties, the oft-rising fears, which there are known, and that frequently make the domestic hearth a very Bochim—a place of weeping. Every family has among its connexions some one, more or less remote, who is the cause of sorrow, and it may be of bitter shame. There is a careful avoidance of all allusion to the erring one, but the ill-suppressed sigh, and the silent burning tear that glitters often on the pale cheek of a sorrowing mother or pure-minded sister, speak volumes of an agony that is consuming the peace of the soul. Every heart has some secret remembrances, sad and gloomy, which make it sigh in the midst of the hilarity of others, and which becloud and darken the brightest scenes in which it may be

found. At every feast there is a skeleton. "Each heart knoweth its own bitterness," one drop of which infused into the cup it daily drinks speaks of "the wormwood and the gall."

"Were every man's internal care
But written on his brow,—
How many would our pity share,
That share our envy now!"

What hearth has not been made sad and lonely by the summons of the destroyer? Whose spirits have not been called to tremble, as the light footsteps of death have entered the chamber of sickness, and the pitiless destroyer has borne away the loved and the lamented from the before happy circle? Has not many a young mother who, in the freshness of her first maternal joy, felt as if another world had opened upon her,—so rich, so new the gush of holy feeling, so exquisite the bliss with which her soul was filled, as she gazed into the eyes of her first-born!—has she not been called to lay that darling in the cold and cheerless grave, and with him the crushed affections of a broken heart? Has not she who was but yesterday a bride, gone down to the house appointed for all living, and the

roses that decked her on her marriage morn been placed around her brow, as she lay silent in her coffin, the bride of the tomb? Has not the wife been summoned to part with the husband of her youth, the father of her children, who gather weeping around her as she stands in the house that is now so desolate, and looks upon them with an aching heart, so full of bitter agony, that none but those whose lot is like hers can ever know? And has not the orphan had often to bewail that father and mother have forsaken him, and that there were few or none save God to take him up? Ah! there has fallen a shadow on every path; and each day, each hour, some one of the children of men "goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets." The divine Father, as he looks abroad, over the wide, wide world, and listens to its many utterances, and of them so many full of intensest woe, may often say, as He did of Israel of old, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people and have heard their cry, for I know their sorrows." In that one assurance, lies the germ of hope for a weeping world!

Now these things are wisely ordained by Him who does all things well. They prevent

an undue elation of spirit in those who are possessors of unusual advantages. They tend to make the lofty humble. They establish the truth of the common brotherhood of humanity. They are calculated to make man more charitable to his fellow man, and constrain every one to pause before he casts the first stone at another. They are likely to make the poor and the afflicted less discontented with their position and prospects, when they find that the highest ranks are not exempt from ills that try them,—though it may be in another form —as much as poverty and suffering try those who are found in the lower ranks of life. Many men are ofttimes dissatisfied with their lot; but not one, if he could by any possibility become experimentally acquainted with the circumstances of all the different classes of society, would find that he was a great gainer by any exchange he might make with his neighbour, whether his lot were higher or lower than his own. There is ever an equitable balance preserved between the varied advantages and disadvantages of men. Prosperity dwells in the immediate vicinity of adversity. "God also hath set the one over against the other." If one tree be higher than others

around, it may the sooner attract the lightning, while the rest remain unscathed.

Above all, this state of things has a powerful tendency to loosen the hold of the affections upon earth and its enjoyments. We learn the lesson more perfectly,—which, though long and faithfully taught us, we are so slow to receive,—that this is not our rest; and with deeper sympathy with the patriarch of Uz we are increasingly inclined to say, "I would not live alway."

But let us turn from the review of this sorrow to the consideration of its cause. We shall find that we have not far to go to discover it. That cause is *Sin*, which, with its offspring Death following close in her train, stands between us and the illuminating smile of God, and makes the shadow that dims life's sunshine, and engirds each spirit with gloom. This accursed foe of God and man has crossed every path; climbed into the highest places of the earth; sat down on the throne with princes, whose hours glide onward amid luxurious splendours; and crept into the deep dungeon, and folded itself round the heart of the captive, whose fountain of life is miserably ebbing drop

by drop away. The learned and the ignorant, the bond and the free, male and female, are alike its victims. With fell swoop, sin descends vulture-like on all. This fearful evil reveals itself under a thousand forms, some of them more specious, and thus more dangerous; but, under some guise or another, openly or covertly, it is found dwelling in every house, nestling in every heart. Terrible yet true is the apostolical announcement, reiterating the sentiment of the Psalmist, uttered hundreds of years before, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

The leprous spot is everywhere visible, and death, though he stand for awhile afar off from most of the sons of men, sees the hated and fatal sign, and knows that because of it he shall be suffered some day to claim every one of earth's children for his own.

Now man often boasts of the possession of intellectual powers, the glorious heritage received direct from God, when "He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." He points to these as that by which he is distinguished from all other works of the divine hand; he exults in the conscious immortality with which God has

endowed his nature, and knows he shall endure when heaven and earth have passed away; that though seemingly the material creation outlives him, yet that really its existence is but for a moment, compared with the eternal duration to which he is destined; that—

> "The sun is but a spark of fire,
> A transient meteor in the sky;
> The soul, immortal as its sire,
> Shall never die!"

The thought is pregnant with something akin to pride; but soon there comes over the reflective soul the remembrance of its guilt, and then rises the startling question, "Will this immortality be a blessed or an accursed one?" For, considered by itself, immortality is not necessarily a good; it belongs to the fallen angels, as well as to those who have kept their first estate, and in their case serves but to invest the chains of darkness which are riveted upon them with an adamantine character, and affix an endless duration to their woe; just as in the case of the pure and sainted ones it gives an undying splendour to their crowns of light, and makes their joy, perfect, and perennial too. Immortality to man, if sin remain unpardoned and unremoved from the soul, will be but another name for eternal

death; and the soul itself with all its glorious and wondrous capacities, its noble and godlike powers, smitten as by an east wind, by the curse of the Holy One, will become a shrivelled and pitiable thing; a mighty spiritual deformity; while its course will be like that of a blasted star, shorn of all its original splendour, and doomed to career for ever wildly and blindly through the illimitable universe.

Now it is sad to reflect that this appalling fact, which it behoves all men thoroughly to know, is sometimes lost sight of, in the undue attention which is given to some inferior, though not unimportant, consequences of the fact. Most people are content to think and speak more of the effects of sin than of sin itself. We hear their acknowledgment, with a sigh, of a "crook in the lot" of every one; and sometimes the complainings are most eloquent and affecting; and evince no small acquaintance with the secret workings of the human soul, no despicable power of analysing the more recondite thoughts of the heart. But when men stop here they do wrong. They have reached but the vestibule of the gloom-encircled temple; another step further is necessary to bring them into the presence of the cause of all this mis-

chief and misery; which, as we have already said, is SIN. This is what men should regard with dissatisfaction and dislike; this they should lament with a profound sorrow; this is that which they should repudiate, more than the evils which have sprung from it, sad and painful as they are. This it is which has darkened every dwelling with the clouds of affliction; pierced every heart with the pangs of grief; woke the wail of the living over the dead; opened the graves of earth for the children of men; and, if divine grace interpose not, will make those graves the gloomy portals that lead to the chambers of eternal death.

Brethren! What think you of this accursed evil, which "has brought death into the world, and all our woe?" Need you any other and fuller exposition of its vileness and hatefulness than that which presents itself everywhere around you? Ten thousand voices are ready to proclaim its real character, and bear testimony to the hideous evils it has engendered. Just listen to the beating of the great heart of humanity, and say, as its pulsations throb and thrill amid the silence of the universe, amid the breathless hush of angel worlds, is it not clear that it is rent with some strong agony?

Could you number the burning tears that have been wrung from the smitten hearts of men; the sighs that have burst from oppressed souls, —though life would end long before the computation could be completed—they would bear testimony to the terrible agency of sin. Could you concentrate the wails of the sorrowing ones, from the hour that the first cry broke so startlingly and strangely on the air of Eden to this moment, would they not make a thunder-peal so terrific, that only God could hear it and live? But add to these the anguish and agony of millions of lost spirits through an eternity of hell, and say if any one could be justly chargeable, in any description, with exaggerating the nature or consequences of sin?

It is a terrible thing; terrible especially when looked at in the magnitude of its collected results. But let it not be forgotten that these are made up of single ones, accompanying single acts of evil. Brethren, each one transgression of yours adds to the number, and its consequences add to the aggregate of woe.

Think of this when next you are tempted to sin, and when the glozing voice of the tempter is heard whispering, "It is but a small transgression, and but one." Let no sophistry delude you with reference to sin. Little as it

may appear, its consequences may be felt through an everlasting night. It may touch only a single chord, but the vibrations may go on through all eternity. Reflect deeply and prayerfully on this subject, that you be not deceived. It is an evil unutterably great; an evil immitigable and infinite. As such it must be regarded and dealt with; hated and shunned.

Happily for you, its worst consequences may be averted, its dominion repudiated and renounced, its deadly grasp shaken off for ever. A deliverer is at hand. The Son of God, who came "to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound," is ready to set you free, and calls upon you to rise, and, with the burning indignation of the freeman, who would spurn the fetters with which an insidious foe would manacle his limbs, shake off the detestable yoke of Satan. Cry! you that are weary with your spirit's bondage—that have groaned as you felt the iron enter into your soul, and longed and struggled for emancipation—

"Mighty Redeemer! set me free,
From my old state of sin;
O make my soul alive to thee,
Create new powers within."

Plead with him—"Save me, and I shall be saved, for thou art the Lord my God:" and he will deliver you.

The foul leprosy which has spread itself over your soul, withered its strength, and robbed it of its moral beauty, may be effectually removed. If you be still uncured, it is not because there is "no balm in Gilead, no physician there." Both are at hand, and you may be restored. Cry! you that are sick of the disease, and writhe under its loathsome curse, "Heal me! and I shall be healed. Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me. Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean!" To such a heart-wrung cry of anguish and desire, his ears cannot fail to be open; and with him to hear is but the immediate prelude to his putting forth his hand to heal.

LECTURE II.

PROVIDENTIAL DISPENSATIONS.

2 KINGS v. 2—7.

EVERY thoughtful reader of the history of the past, and every watchful observer of the occurrences of the present, must repeatedly have met with the most singular and striking illustrations of the truth, that great events often originate in trivial causes. A very insignificant transaction—that is, one that appeared so at the time it happened—may be attended by consequences so wide-spread and momentous, that the mind is startled at their number and magnitude, and becomes perfectly bewildered in attempting to follow them only a short distance: to trace them onward to their ultimate issues is, to man, with vision so exceedingly limited, an utter impossibility.

We designate things small or great because so they appear to our minds, that are not able to comprehend the final results that flow from them; whereas, to the eye of the Infinite and Omniscient God, these very supposed trifles—

they may be words or deeds—being associated with all their consequences, near and remote, are seen to be matters of the mightiest import. Who, if he were entirely ignorant of the fact, and of the events that have sprung from it, would when first told ever conceive that the transgression of Adam in the garden—as the record is given us in the book of Genesis—would be attended with results so inconceivably tremendous as those which followed—results which are now, and will be for ever, felt in heaven, and earth, and hell; extending and multiplying throughout the vast and ever-increasing circle of the intelligent universe?

As in the general history of the world and of nations, so in the history of individuals, there is this kind of occurrences, of which we have just spoken. These are illustrations of the cheering Christian doctrine of a special providence, that controls the minute as well as the vast; that, with equal ease and condescension, directs the stars in their courses through the measureless depths of space, watches the sparrow as it falls to the ground, and numbers the very hairs of our heads. It is an exceedingly short-sighted philosophy that denies the existence of a particular providence; that is content to believe

only in a general and undistinguishing oversight of things in heaven and things on the earth; that seems to regard it as beneath the dignity of God to interest himself in the affairs of each individual spirit, and even whispers of the impossibility of controlling the almost infinite number of individual acts and things which make up the sum of created existence; forgetting that generals are, after all, only a multiplication of many particulars, and that to the Infinite there is as much condescension in regarding the whole, as in interesting himself in any of its parts; while the mention of difficulty in connexion with Omnipotence is unutterably absurd.

Now, in the text we have illustrations of what may be designated providential interpositions on the behalf of Naaman, in which there is nothing out of the common course of events —nothing startling or strange.

In the preliminary occurrences that were to lead ultimately to the restoration of the Syrian noble to health, no supernatural means were employed, because human instrumentality, of an ordinary character, was perfectly adequate to the accomplishment of the end in view. God never works miracles unnecessarily.

In one of the frequent incursions of the Syrian army into the land of Israel, the soldiers had taken captive a little Jewish maid, who was given to the wife of Naaman, and served her in the capacity of personal attendant.

That most terrible of earthly curses—war—entails its miserable consequences on the young as well as the old; the gentler as well as the sterner sex; and most frequently falls far more heavily upon the innocent than the guilty. It not only devastates fair and smiling lands, destroys peaceful and flourishing cities, but severs families, violates the holiest relationships of life, and sows broad-cast myriads of dragons' teeth, which are the germ of unnumbered and appalling evils.

This little Jewish maid appears upon the scene of history in the character of a captive,—lonely as an orphan,—but perhaps with the sad reflection embittering her solitary hours that the authors of her existence might be yet alive, but she must not cherish in her heart the hope that she should ever be permitted to see them again. She thought of them enduring the agony of her loss, and almost yearning for the melancholy consolation of knowing that her sorrows had been ended by a merciful

death. Often, doubtless, in the silent watches of the night, the weeping mother bewailed the absent one, her heart picturing the worst of evils as having befallen her. Often would she wake from happy dreams, in which the ringing laughter of her child had fallen like summer music on her ears, and her sunny smile had greeted her as she sported by her side—wake to the consciousness of the heart-sinking reality that that child was far away among strangers in a strange land, that—

"Under the palm-trees she no more should meet her,
When from the fount at evening she return,
With the full water-urn;
Nor will her sleep's low dove-like breathings greet her,
As 'mid the silence of the stars she wake,
And weeps for her dear sake."

Unconsciously, however, that Jewish maiden was the object of the watchful providence of her heavenly Father, who had chosen her to be an agent in effectuating the restoration of Naaman to health, and—better still—in leading him to a saving knowledge of the God of Israel.

This result of the mysterious movements of the divine hand was doubtless seen, in after days, to be one of the designs of Infinite wisdom

in permitting her capture. The wrath of man is made to redound to the praise of God.

It appears that the maiden brought with her from her native vales a vivid remembrance of the miracles of power and mercy which had been wrought by the prophet Elisha, and with the fame of which the mountains of Samaria had rung. She had probably heard of the transactions at Jordan and Jericho, at Shunem and Gilgal;* and with such evidence of the possession of mysterious power, she reasoned that the prophet would be able to cure her master of his fearful disease; and she said unto her mistress, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria, for he would recover him of his leprosy."

No doubt this Jewish maid had seen, as she waited upon her mistress, the gloom which this dark shadow had thrown across the path of Naaman and his wife, and her sympathy with them—the evidence of native goodness of heart—constrained her to break the silence which her dependent and menial position might have enjoined, and to endeavour to relieve their oppressed spirits, by giving the

* 2 Kings ii. 14, 19—22; iv. 32—37, 38—44.

information which she possessed, and which she hoped might be serviceable to her afflicted master. Naaman was peculiarly favoured in his domestics, as the narrative will yet further show, when we come to consider the wise counsels which some of them gave him in the most critical hour of his life.

We may observe, in passing, that what God, by an apparently insignificant instrumentality, was pleased to do in relation to Naaman, possessed by a grievous bodily disease, he often does now—and in the use of similarly feeble means—to men affected with spiritual maladies of a yet more fatal character. A little child has not unfrequently been the means of turning ungodly parents from the error of their ways, by the artless language of a gentle and loving heart, baptized with the spirit of gospel truth. Some lessons, learned from the lips of a devoted Sabbath school teacher, have fixed themselves in the memory and heart of a docile pupil; some simple yet pungent tract has been given him, and both have been conveyed to the home of poverty, misery, irreligion, and blasphemy, and transformed that moral desert into a spot fair and fruitful as the garden of the Lord. A sermon is heard in some sanctuary, by a casual

passer-by, that opens the spiritual world to his soul's vision, and renovates the entire man; while perhaps he and the preacher will never meet again till they stand before the great tribunal. The latter drew the bow at a venture, but he never knew, and never will know, till "the day shall reveal it," that the arrow went home to a human heart, and subdued an enemy of his Master, changing him to a friend. God sends a pious servant into an irreligious family, of the members of which it may, with painful truth, be said, "There is no fear of God before their eyes," and gives the opportunity, as well as the ability and willingness, to speak for him and for the truth. It may be that that dwelling is darkened by the shadow of death; a loved child may, amid the stillness of the hushed and curtained chamber, broken only by the sighs and sobs of those who weep around, be passing away to the happier land, whither angels wait to bear him; but those who mourn know not the way thither themselves. This devout domestic, however, points them to the Prophet who can heal their broken hearts; breathes words in season, that fall like dew on the fevered spirit; and leads that spirit, prostrate in the dust, so to think and feel, that at

length, like David, it can say, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

Surely in all this there can be nothing wrong, nothing indecorous, or unbecoming a domestic's social position; nay more, it must be the only right course that a pious servant could, under the circumstances supposed, possibly pursue. If the little Israelitish maid, of whom we have been speaking, did not do wrong in proffering her advice to her mistress, that Naaman might be healed of his bodily leprosy, others similarly situated have resting upon them a mightier obligation to offer their assistance and advice to those who are affected with a spiritual leprosy, of the real nature of which, with all its fearful consequences, they are utterly ignorant; and who know absolutely nothing of the necessary means and instruments of cure. Such a servant or friend, who brings salvation to any house or heart, is a priceless treasure.

The words of the child, though she was but a slave, appear to have fallen on eagerly listening ears. The wife of Namaan caught gladly at the hope they held out of a prospect of restoration to her husband. It is most

certain that all available human means would long before this time have been tried—all the resources of the most skilful physicians put into exercise to eradicate the disease, whose existence made the life of the Syrian captain a burden. He, therefore, as well as his wife, would be ready to hearken to any suggestion or instruction, no matter from what quarter it came, that seemed to hold out the promise of a cure.

The words of the Jewish maid soon travelled to the ears of the king. It is most probable that Naaman himself was the party by whom he was informed; and no sooner had he heard of it, than with the quickness of friendship, eager to be of service to one to whom he owed so much, he endeavoured to put matters in train, to bring about an interview with the man who it was hoped would effect a recovery. Neither he nor Naaman appears to have been unwilling that the latter should place himself in the hands of one of the people with whom they had recently been at war. Cure by any one, even an enemy, would be welcome to master and servant. Alas; how differently do men act in relation to their spiritual health; most seem unwilling to be healed of their moral diseases, even by a loving

and generous Friend, who has given proof the most indisputable of his tender interest in the welfare of man, and who, without waiting until the afflicted and smitten sought for his aid, came spontaneously "to seek and save the lost." Strange and sad! that man should be so eager to secure his temporal and physical welfare, and so indifferent to his higher and nobler spiritual interests.

We shall hear no more of the Israelitish maiden after this; but we shall see the issue of her kind and generous interference on Naaman's behalf. The primary mover in the whole transaction retires from our view, after having pointed out the way for the accomplishment of a desired and important purpose. She had fulfilled her mission in relation to this matter, and is seen no more. We can scarcely conceive it otherwise than that Naaman, when he was restored to health, and had returned home a changed man in body and soul, would immediately grant her freedom to his wife's attendant, to whom he was under such imperishable obligations; and seek to place her in the arms of those whose souls were praying and watching for her return, as eagerly as they who watch for the morning.

Naaman was instructed to prepare for his journey into Samaria, while the king wrote to Jehoram, at that time reigning over Israel. The second chief agent now appears on the scene, whose co-operation was required to bring about the recovery of Naaman. It was on many accounts essential that the cheerful permission of Benhadad should be given to that journey; without it he would not have ventured, probably would not have been permitted, to leave Syria. Besides this, it might be necessary for his peaceable admission into the country of Samaria, and the court of the king, that he should have his master's epistle of commendation, to assure Jehoram that his present visit to the land of Israel was one of an entirely pacific character,—personal and not official—that of a friend and not an enemy; that of a suppliant seeking a favour, not a soldier to smite a foe. At once these objects were achieved, at least so it was thought, so far as they depended upon the countenance of the Syrian king.

But now is seen the royal ignorance. From the tenor of his letter it would appear that he thought the king of Israel was the party to whom the Jewish maid referred. She had not mentioned the name of Elisha, and probably

Benhadad had not heard of him. But, as among the heathen the regal and sacerdotal offices were not unfrequently combined in one and the same person, he might think it was so in Samaria, and that the king was he who would restore his suffering servant to health; or, at least, that he had but to give orders to one who did possess such restorative powers, and the cure would be effected. The communication, which was brief and laconic, thus ran: "Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." With this missive he departed from Damascus, taking along with him a suitable retinue; and, as was the custom in the east,—and one which continues to this day, in seeking the presence and favour of a powerful monarch or chief,—he bore with him a costly present, which, as we judge from its exceeding value, was designed for the king, under the impression already referred to, that he was the person by whom Naaman was to be cured of his leprosy.

Many and mingled must have been the emotions that swelled the heart of the traveller as he turned from his home towards the land of

Samaria. In past times he had gone thither on marauding expeditions, "to kill and to destroy;" now he sought it with peaceful demeanour; a claimant on the pity and sympathy of one of its inhabitants, said to be possessed of a mysterious power to heal. Would that power be exerted for *him* whose name had been a word of terror and hatred to Israel? and, if exerted, would it prove efficacious? Would he return to Damascus in a capacity to enjoy its luxuriant beauty, happy in the possession of restored health; or must he, with a sadder heart than ever, retrace his sorrowful steps towards his home, a leper uncured, and without hope of cure? Such thoughts as these no doubt passed through his mind, as he traversed the path that led to the chief city of the land of Israel, and the abode of its king.

The letter of his master Naaman appears to have sent or brought direct to Jehoram. As soon as the latter had made himself acquainted with its contents, he appears hastily to have regarded the whole affair as a concerted scheme, on the part of the neighbouring monarch, to entrap him into hostilities with Syria. Certainly the abrupt character of the royal com-

munication — so very strange, without any previous explanation of the circumstances of the case—would be puzzling and perplexing to him. He might however have waited, until an interview with the bearer had enlightened him upon the subject of this enigmatical epistle, before he yielded to the craven fears that seem so fully and rapidly to have possessed him. Instead of this, when he had read the letter he rent his clothes, giving way to pusillanimous and useless grief, and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?"

In these words the king gives utterance to the prevalent opinion that God alone could cure this disease; and to his conviction of the utter hopelessness of the restoration of Naaman being effected, by any ordinary and human means. Thinking, therefore, that Benhadad had sent to him to do an impossible thing, he could interpret the matter in no other way than that a plot was being laid for him by that monarch, who was eager to find some cause for war; and he said to his courtiers around him, "Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me." Now all this

unnecessary perturbation of mind arose from a very simple, but almost inexcusable mistake, which a slight inquiry and momentary conference with his Syrian visitor would speedily have rectified.

All this is very similar to what frequently occurs among men who, on the subject of religion, fall into great and serious errors, for which they have themselves alone to blame, and which involve them in no small amount of anxiety and trouble. They misinterpret the messages of God, seize hold of fragmentary parts thereof, and thus wresting them from their proper connexions, attach a meaning to them they were never intended to convey. A disturbed conscience makes them write bitter things against themselves, and leads them to imagine God will surely destroy them; while a correct explanation of what he has written would remove their fears, and show how unjust have been the harsh judgments which they have formed concerning Him; that He has "thoughts of peace towards them, and not of evil."

All this time it does not appear that Jehoram or his servants remembered that there was a prophet in Israel, to whom, in emergencies like this, it was their privilege to be permitted to

go for advice and assistance. Men, from ignorance or folly, often fail to recollect and seek their best friends in those hours when counsel or help, or both, would prove of infinite service, and when probably neither the one nor the other would be refused. They give way to an unmanly grief and abandonment, instead of facing their difficulties boldly, and reflecting on the best and quickest methods to be adopted for freeing themselves from impending calamities. There are not a few persons who seem destitute of the right spirit to meet the frequently recurring vicissitudes of life; who appear as if they always needed some one to think and act for them, so sadly deficient are they in presence of mind, clearness of mental perception, decision of character, and promptitude of action.

We shall find in the next lecture that the overtures were first made by the prophet, and not by the king, as ought to have been the case. Elisha was both obliged to help, and to proffer his help, unsought.

Now, in the events which have rapidly passed in review before us, the chain of providential occurrences is distinctly visible.—The irruption of the Syrians into Palestine; the seizing

of the little Israelitish maiden; her location in the house of Naaman, and in close attendance upon his wife,—through which she would have ample opportunities of discovering the evil under which her master groaned, and of seeing the sadness and sorrow it produced; her artless exclamation; the conveyance of her words to the king, who,—if any, would have the inclination and influence to bring about an interview between his servant and the man possessed of miraculous powers; his communication to Jehoram—which was of such a nature as to awaken the fears of the Israelitish king, and lead him to do an act, which was only done on occasions of special grief or alarm, and which being told to Elisha, led to an interview between the parties, that issued in the recovery of the leper: all these were links in the chain.

Here are agents in low places and high. Captives and kings are made instrumental, in the hands of God, to bring about, not merely a restoration from a physical malady of the most inveterate kind, but also to bring Naaman to a correct knowledge, an experimental acquaintance with the true God. "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out." How true it is, that "he will

bring the blind by a way that they know not; he will lead them in paths that they have not known; he will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight."

The history of mankind is filled with instances of such remarkable interpositions of God on behalf of his creatures, so that he who, after personally meeting with them, or having had his deliberate attention called to them, should deny or doubt the superintending providence of an all-wise and beneficent God, is a man with whom it would be useless to argue. Look at the histories of Joseph, Moses, David. What singular preparations for the greatness to which they were destined! what admirable trainings, in schools apparently the most unsuitable for them, and which yet best prepared them for the lofty and responsible positions they were ultimately called to fill! What a combination of events, the result of the free actions of different individuals, and all widely separated from each other! What a concatenation of occurrences, apparently unconnected, and yet all forming vital links of a chain, the invisible end of which was held in the hand of God! How many things at first seemed the most untoward, —in the vocabulary of the world, most unfortunate—seemed as if about to becloud the prospect

the moment it began to dawn in hope and beauty! How all things, until the issue taught them to read events aright, appeared to be working together against them! And yet these very things were afterwards seen to be essential parts of the providential plan, indispensable portions of the moral means by which God was educing the grand ultimate results. In their case, and that of multitudes since their day, there was a vivid illustration of the apostolic assurance, "All things work together for good to them that love God."

Every individual, if he look back on the way in which he has been led, will be able, without any very great trouble, to light upon periods and circumstances in his history, when difficulties gathered around his path, and his way seemed hedged about with thorns; yet out of them all he has been constantly delivered; and these very difficulties, which at first sight so appalled him, have been made subservient to his highest good. By a divine alchemy, materials the most incongruous, and apparently the most valueless, have been transmuted into gold. Our great national bard uttered a truth of the highest order, when he said, "There is a divinity that shapes our affairs, rough hew

them how we will." Another poet, with less of genius, but more of Christianity, says,

> "He overrules all mortal things,
> And manages our mean affairs;
> On humble souls the King of kings
> Bestows his counsel and his cares."

And a mightier than all has said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered;"—a proverbial expression indicative of the fact, that the providential government of God over his creatures extends to the most minute and apparently insignificant matters.

There is an unwise mode of talking very prevalent among men, although, doubtless, with them their words mean less than they imply. They speak of accidents, and chances, and casualties in human life, when, in reality, nothing of the kind exists, or can be supposed to exist, in a universe controlled and guided by a Being of goodness, girded with omnipotence, and whose omniscience and wisdom are illimitable. These so-called casualties have all their appropriate place in the divine plan; they are connecting screws that serve to bind the several

parts together, if they are not the great wheels of the moral machinery of heaven. All things are ordered and regulated according to fixed laws, determined and appointed by Him who sees the end from the beginning, and who cannot err. Nothing happens out of order, out of time, or out of place.

It has been discovered by astronomers that those striking, fiery masses, the comets—whose sudden and unexpected appearance was formerly regarded as the precursor of a thousand imaginary evils, and whose name became a synonyme for every thing erratic and uncertain — are regulated by laws as fixed and unchanging as that by which the evening star unveils her brow to glance upon the splendours of departing day, or that by which the moon reveals her beauty, or retires for a season from our sight.

It is found in the moral as in the physical universe. The tissue of providential events may appear intricate; so do, and are, the movements of the starry worlds. As the countless systems rush on in their trackless paths, crossing and re-crossing each other's orbits, weaving and interweaving their invisible lines in the mystic web of space, to those who are ignorant of the laws by which each world is governed, it would

seem as if there must be collision, or, at least, confusion; yet they never interfere with each other, but work out the great and marvellous designs of God with the most extraordinary precision, and with undeviating regularity. So is it with the manifold and varifold occurrences of human existence. All is order and harmony; perfect and absolute. Every event of life is under the controlling hand of "the only wise God;" every child of man is the object of his unslumbering watchfulness and paternal care.

Is there not something profoundly wonderful in this thought—that, amid the millions of the human race on earth—that earth itself but as an atom amid innumerable surrounding worlds —not one of the family of man is overlooked by God? that I, or you, though you be a child of poverty, trampled on by the passers-by amid the crowds of a great city, stand as plainly before the burning eye of the Eternal, as if you trod this world's highway alone—stood by yourself upon the wide expanse of earth, and this earth was all that remained of the mighty creation of Omnipotent Wisdom, and you and God the only intelligent beings existing amidst illimitable space?

Why, the heart both swells and sinks with

the mighty thought! Like David, the magnitude of the idea oppresses us, and we exclaim, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high; I cannot attain unto it."

Be it so. Make this acknowledgment if you will, and give full utterance to all your wonder at the thought; but never deny its solemn reality. Never attempt to reason yourself, or allow yourself to be reasoned by others, out of the firm belief of a special providence over you and every child of man. That truth has a magic charm about it — a divine, magnetic power, that is calculated to draw you closer to God.

There is not—settle it in your very soul—what some men term a general providential care of man, but a particular one; of which truth, only a small amount of reflection will serve to convince you.

We may turn, by a not unnatural transition, from this to another subject, and observe, that while, in looking at the scheme of redemption, it is not wrong to contemplate it as a redemption wrought out for all, you must, if you would be delivered by him who is "mighty to save," individually seek him, personally rely upon

him, and, with holy boldness and an appropriating faith, exclaim with the apostle to the Gentiles, "He loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*." While a provision has been made for all —"for he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world,"—the participation of it must be sought and enjoyed by each one for himself—alone.

Finally. Adore the providence of God which perhaps, to-night, has brought you from the midst of ungodly associations to hear words whereby you may be saved. Believe me, this is no chance, but the gracious dealings of God with your soul. You may, before to-night, have heard of the things of eternity, but perhaps you have neglected all attention to them. The sad and unwelcome truth may in past days have faintly gleamed upon your soul, that there is a malady affecting it, which, if unremoved, may prove more mischievous than you like to believe, or dare to think of. Ah! if to-night this truth stand before you, as perhaps it now does, no longer seen obscurely but set as in a circle of convincing light; if the faintly remembered lessons of childhood are starting up again in the memory with a

meaning they never had before; if you should have heard with attention and interest what has been said of a divine Prophet who can remove the leprosy that afflicts you; and be stirred with an earnest desire to seek his beneficent and necessary assistance, and obtain freedom from the curse and influence of your sins; if, following the unseen voice that even now is calling you, you reach the cross of the Son of God, and find forgiveness, and receive the baptism of the Divine Spirit, and become a new creature in Christ Jesus—and all these things are not problematical, but certain, if you will only follow the injunctions of the Bible, and the answering dictates of your own conscience,—then there will be no need to attempt further to convince you of the reality of a special providence. Your own personal experience will supersede the necessity of all other testimony; you will think and speak like the Samaritans,* who at first heard of the words of Christ through the medium of another, and were inclined to give credit to them; but who, when they heard Him for themselves, became affected with deeper convictions, and exercised

* John iv. 42.

a livelier faith. Your own case will ever be an illustration so clear, so forcible, that the truth of David's words will be deeply felt, "Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising: thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee."*

* Psalm cxxxix. 2—5, 16—18.

LECTURE III.

DIVINE AND HUMAN PLANS OF SALVATION; OR THE WATERS OF JORDAN AND THE RIVERS OF DAMASCUS.

2 KINGS v. 8—12.

IT would not have been a dishonourable act, nor one demanding a vast amount of condescension, if the king of Israel, when his mind was troubled by the contents of the letter of the king of Syria, had sought the counsel of the prophet Elisha. But a feeling of haughty pride; or perhaps, forgetfulness that there dwelt such a man in Samaria; or, what is still more likely, the secret consciousness of his utter unworthiness of any help which Elisha might be able to afford him in this emergency, led him to keep his fears to himself, and to solicit neither advice nor assistance.

The prophet, however, by some means heard of the perturbation into which the king was thrown by the receipt of Benhadad's letter. It is not improbable that he received a secret intimation from God, both as to the exact state of

things in relation to Naaman, and the line of conduct which should be adopted towards him, in the matter of his recovery. This supposition will account for the peculiar character of the message which Elisha sent to Jehoram, which was one of authoritative rebuke, and in perfect harmony with the dignified position which, as the accredited messengers of the most High God, the ancient prophets assumed before men, even the highest in station and power.

"And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

One is irresistibly reminded, by this message, of the words of a later prophet,* "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready

* Isaiah li. 12, 13.

to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?"

After rebuking his unmanly fears, we perceive that in the latter part of his message, in which he speaks the language of positive assurance, as became one who had received his instructions from God, he relieves the mind of the king from his ill-founded apprehensions, "He shall know that there is a prophet in Israel," if Israel's king forgets it. Elisha was evidently eager to avail himself of the opportunity of glorifying his Divine Master, and of showing the infinite superiority of Jehovah to all the "gods many and lords many" of heathen Syria. This would be done when the miraculous cure was effected; of the certainty of which we may well believe the prophet was assured, if the conditions demanded were all complied with.

The line of conduct adopted by Elisha was but a faint pre-shadowing of that which has been pursued by a greater than he. Man, in the difficulties and dangers and woes to which his transgressions of the divine law have brought him, seeks not God to deliver him. No cry from his burdened and bleeding heart is directed to the ears of the truly beneficent and

compassionate One, who "delighteth in mercy, and waiteth to be gracious." "God is not in all his thoughts." He seems to forget his existence; or if he remember it, he is ashamed to call upon him; imagining that on account of his previous neglect of God, he will be met with an utter indifference, even to his most earnest and agonizing appeals.

Man thus judges of God as he would of his fellow man; but that judgment, by anticipation, Jehovah deprecates; "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." In the fulness of his divine mercy he makes the first overtures to the sinner; offering the aid without which he must inevitably perish. He graciously reasons with him on the folly of his conduct, and shows the necessity for an immediate repentance—that is, a change of mind. He assures him, that no matter what the amount or aggravation of his guilt in the past, it *can* be removed; and, by the intervention of the divine Redeemer, *shall*, in the case of every one that believeth: that however disturbed and wretched the mind of man may

have been, through that Redeemer, it shall realise a peace "that passeth understanding," a rest that is the portion of the people of God. Thus, from the throne of light, ever come forth voices of encouragement, words of pity, breathed in tones of the deepest tenderness, and addressed to the guiltiest: "Let him come now to me." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Yes, "God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Naaman appears to have been made acquainted with the message of the prophet, and immediately perceiving the mistake into which both he and his royal master had fallen, with reference to the person by whom the cure was to be wrought, he "came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha."

Here was one of the great ones of the earth,

a mighty man of renown, waiting, as an applicant for a precious boon, at the door of the dwelling of an Israelitish ploughman! Is there not something in this of unusual signification? Is there not, independent of the fact that the latter is the man in whose hands are supposed to rest his life and happiness,—and this might justify the court paid to the prophet—a deeper truth set before us?—that worldly rank and splendour confer not upon any man the true greatness which spiritual gifts and graces bestow. Elisha, to whom prophetic knowledge had been communicated, on whom the mysterious influence of the Holy Ghost had rested, who was favoured with intercourse with the King of Kings, and on whose eyes the grandeurs and glories of a world to others invisible had flashed again and again, was surely a man occupying a far higher and nobler position than Naaman could be said to fill, with all his rank, and wealth, and honours. And this fact seems to have revealed itself, in the position assumed and the conduct exhibited by the prophet, which, as we shall see, tended rather to the annoyance of Naaman and to the wounding of his self-love.

Elisha was evidently careful not to allow the Syrian to imagine that he thought there was any condescension exhibited by him in this visit; and the mode of proceeding which the former adopted was doubtless so determined on, in order to set Naaman right upon a point in which he was evidently wrong. Elisha taught him the grand lesson, that in the sight of God, and in the sight of all his true servants, in matters pertaining to God, there is no respect of persons; that Jew and Greek, Barbarian and Scythian, bond and free, are equal all.

This truth was unquestionably shadowed forth under the old dispensation, as witness the divine command* for the offering of the half-shekel by every man unto the Lord, as a ransom for his soul: "the rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than half a shekel, when they give an offering unto the Lord, to make atonement for their souls."

But how gloriously it is presented in the gospel! That is emphatically a "common salvation" which it proclaims; and princes and peasants, if they would participate in its favours, must alike be found in the same posture, at the

* Exod. xxx. 11—16.

foot of the cross, as undeserving suppliants of the divine mercy. Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, is not more welcome than Mary Magdalene. The one, as well as the other, is found at the feet of the Divine Master. The young man who had kept all the commandments from his youth, must take up his cross, as well as he who denied his Master with oaths and curses, and he who consented to the death of the first martyrs, and "breathed threatenings and slaughter" against the church of God.

Naaman stood at the door of the house of the prophet; but the latter came not forth. He contented himself, in the maintenance of the line of conduct which he had adopted, with sending a messenger unto Naaman, giving him instructions what to do. "Go, wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean."

There can be little doubt that he was taught by God to give this singular direction to his visitor. Elisha could not himself have conceived of such a mode of proceeding, for he knew that there were no sanitary qualities in the waters of Jordan, that would prove

serviceable to a man afflicted with leprosy, and that neither seven nor seventy times seven ablutions would remove the disease. We must, therefore, regard this as the plan which Jehovah had thought fit to adopt, as a test of the faith and obedience of Naaman, and which he had communicated to his servant. The positiveness with which Elisha predicted the restoration of the leper, if these conditions were complied with, is a proof that he had received assurances from one with whom was "the greatness, and the power, and the glory," and who was able to make the words of the prophet good. The command was simple, and the promise sure.

Now this was God's method of restoration. By the mouth of his prophet he uttered his directions, and the observance of his words by Naaman would be followed by the recovery of his health; while the neglect thereof would be attended with the perpetuation of his disease. It was pre-eminently an act of faith which was here demanded of the Syrian captain; it was *that*, of which the washing in Jordan was merely the outward sign and expression, that would bring about restoration. The immediate cause of recovery would be, doubtless, the

power of God. This in its irresistibleness would be put forth, when the obedience of faith was displayed. To say, therefore, that it was his faith, or that it was the omnipotence of Jehovah which restored him, would be equally correct. The former led to the exercise of the latter; the latter would not have been put forth without the existence and manifestation of the former.

Now no one surely has a warrant for questioning the perfect right of God to institute such conditions as these, or any others he may choose, as pre-necessary to the exercise of his divine power, especially in matters so purely gratuitous as this, the removal of an inveterate disease in a miraculous manner.

A physician, under ordinary circumstances, prescribes according to the nature of the complaint. It would be somewhat singular and anomalous, if the patient who placed himself under his direction, should question his right to insist upon a certain mode of proceeding being adopted, to ensure a cure. Under the *extraordinary* circumstances, like those now before us, it would be both foolish and ungrateful so to do.

But this folly, of which we have just spoken,

was displayed most offensively by Naaman, as soon as he had heard the message of the prophet. His haughty spirit was chafed at the nature of the instructions given; and he met them, evidently, as a man who seemed to think he had a right to dictate how the thing which he wished to be effected should be done. Though he was there in the character of a suppliant, and was the party to be benefited, he strangely imagined that homage was to be paid to him by the man who was to prove his greatest benefactor, and before whom, if he had rightly understood their relative positions, he would have appeared in a very different temper and spirit. "Behold, I thought he will surely *come out to me!*" Such a visitor certainly was not found every day at Elisha's dwelling. But the captain of the hosts of Syria forgot he was not now in the precincts of his master's palace, nor at the door of some obsequious servant of the king, who would be but too ready to exhibit a courtly complaisance to the royal favourite. He had not yet learned to understand his proper position. His pride was to have a fall. Before the enjoyment of the honour which God designed to confer upon him, there must be awakened in his heart the spirit of profound

humility. He was learning the preparatory lesson; but at first showed himself to be an intemperate and capricious scholar.

He not only expressed his disapprobation of the entire plan, but next cavilled at the several details, "Behold, I thought he would come out to me, and stand and call upon the name of his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper."*

* "This is a curious and a most ancient instance of a very prevalent superstition, which ascribed extraordinary healing powers to the *touch* of persons of high rank, or of real or reputed sanctity. The touch was, in fact, everywhere the established mode by which a person was expected to exhibit whatever healing power he possessed, or pretended to. At this day it is not unusual in the East for a European physician to be expected to heal a patient merely by stroking his hand over the ailing part: and still more is this the case when the person applied to is supposed to be endowed with supernatural powers. We can find illustrations of this in England. Even so late as the reign of Queen Anne, our sovereigns were supposed to possess the power of healing the 'king's evil' by their touch; and as it was found a convenient instrument of state for confirming the loyalty of the ignorant, the virtue thus liberally conceded to the touch of loyalty, was not, until after the above-named reign, left unexercised. On stated occasions, the touch of the royal hand was

The invocation of the Deity, with whom the power of healing was supposed to reside, and which truth seems to have been recognized by Naaman, was deemed an essential part of the incantations performed by the heathen of ancient and modern days, when any specific favour was to be sought. But it was deemed equally essential that the agent of the god should, in the case of sickness, come into personal contact with the afflicted person. It was presumed that he was the only appointed instrument for the conveyance of the divine blessing—the indispensable channel of communication between heaven and earth. Through his hands the

bestowed on the afflicted, during a religious service appropriate to the occasion. Edward the Confessor and Charles II. are even reported to have healed the blind by the same process, as the Emperor Vespasian was said to have done long before. [Of course this is not true.]

"The leading idea, which assigns to the hands the faculty of transmitting spiritual powers, or of communicating healing virtues, is clearly taken from the common use of the same members in communicating or bestowing temporal benefits; and in conformity with it, the lame, the blind, and the deaf, who sought help from 'the Son of David,' often received it through the imposition of his hands upon the parts affected."—*Kitto's Pictorial Bible.*

mysterious and efficacious power was to go forth, by which health and life should be restored to the sick and the dying. Imagining, therefore, that power resided in the touch, and was dependent upon it, Naaman could not conceive of restoration being effected without any contact—without even a sight of the patient! Difficult as it would have been for him to explain how actual communication with him could effect a restoration, he felt it to be a still more insuperable difficulty to believe, that without it he could be made whole. This was, however, one of the things designed to test his faith, which, at the outset, was most assuredly feeble and unsatisfactory in its workings.

Mistakes of a similar kind, but infinitely more terrible, because of their more ruinous consequences, have been made by men with reference to the process of healing the soul of its moral leprosy. So low has it fallen, so despiritualized have its tastes and pursuits become in all, that every where it is found seeking a religion of sense. It is prone to take refuge in the material, from a dislike of the mental and moral effort required to realise the spiritual. It seems of itself to be incapable

of originating the idea of the existence of God, as the Scriptures represent him, a being immortal, invisible, omniscient, and every where present. The sublime truth which the Saviour enunciated, "God is a Spirit," is one that would have remained for ever unknown upon earth, unless it had been thus proclaimed by "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father," who came to "declare him." Thus it is generally found among men who are destitute of revelation, that the deity they adore is clothed in some material form. The sun, in his majesty and splendour, or "the moon, walking in brightness," or animals, rivers, fountains, plants, or trees, have been selected by different nations as the objects of their religious adoration. When the soul becomes most imbruted, it shapes a hideous form out of the tree of the forest, or moulds it in silver and gold, and it "falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me, for thou art my god." Even where the light of revelation has shone, and the unerring teachings of Divine truth have been enjoyed, men by degrees have lost sight of the spirituality of the gospel, and have forsaken the simplicity of worship as it is laid

down in the New Testament; led away by that love of the visible and tangible in religion, which, as we have said, is one of the signs of our fallen condition.

The religion of Christ and his apostles, that made its appeal to the intellect and the heart —not by ministering to the sensuous in man, but by the presentation of simple yet sublime truths, couched in words that all could understand; that recognized the spiritual in his nature, and sought to bring it into action, by demanding the exercise of faith—that religion has been exchanged for a counterfeit one, that inculcates a multitude of outward forms and rites; that insists upon a scrupulous adherence to the most minute ceremonials; and that ascribes extraordinary virtues to certain ordinances, and the doings of certain men; that is to say, to the ordinances administered by the chosen men, to the men as engaged in the appointed ordinances; and these observed at fixed times, and in a selected place, with postures and genuflexions after the most approved fashion.

Hence has sprung the most gigantic system of anti-spiritual religion the world ever saw,— a system whose founders and perpetuators, with

the most consummate subtlety, have made provision to take captive the unwary soul, by skilfully possessing themselves of every avenue of the senses; by laying down, as indispensable to its peace and safety, the necessity for the abandonment of the right of private judgment, and for the surrender of the whole mental and moral powers to the dictates of those who blasphemously assume the possession of the delegated authority of Heaven. Now this system is emphatically a carnal one, from beginning to end; it points rather to the crucifix, than tells men of the doctrine of the atonement, which the cross was meant to unfold; it speaks of the virtues of baptismal water, rather than of the necessity for the influence of the Spirit of God, without which no change ever did, or ever will, pass on man or child; it displays the wafer or the consecrated bread, and tells men who partake thereof that they receive the identical body of the Son of God, and the soul is thereby made secure for eternity, instead of speaking of the necessity for faith,—an intellectual and moral, not a sensual act,—faith in the merits of that sacrifice which the Saviour offered, and the Father accepted, on behalf of a dying world. Sight,

hearing, taste; these are all appealed to; and, alas! with the sensuous acts, the religion of the vast majority ends. A more spiritual religion they cannot understand; they know nothing of its nature; they see not its necessity. Deprive them of the outward forms and ceremonials, shut them out from the supposed sacred spot, and place them in the midst of a few who worship God without ostentatious parade, "worship him in spirit and in truth," and they have no sympathy with them. They sigh for the gorgeous altar, with its tabernacle and tapers, its crucifix, and consecrated elements; for the dulcet strains of music that float along fretted roof, and whisper round clustered pillars and pointed arch; for the curling and fragrant incense that ascends in its wreathed clouds toward heaven; and all the paraphernalia of a sumptuous and material worship. They must have a religion of sense, or, what they designate religious emotions will be unfelt and unknown. They mistake a sickly sentimentalism for real piety—a terrible and fatal mistake to many.

Now all this is just suitable to the unregenerate nature of man, and suffices for those who never read their bibles, and who never

think. If men do think about these things, and do not inform themselves of the representations of the word of God, they become infidels,—as half the Continent is at this hour. There this ritual religion exists full blown, and there too exists a great deal of severe thinking; but the scriptures are not found there, or, if possessed, are rarely read. Hence the prevalent scepticism, which is the legitimate offspring of Popery. If, where they have bibles, they read them intelligently, they must perceive the antagonism of the Scriptures to this vicious system, and must either forsake it at all hazards, protesting against its irreligiousness, as many do, and suffer for their conscientiousness; or remain in it and run the risk of living and dying convicted hypocrites, miserable men for time and for eternity.

We have, therefore, existing in the world, two systems that are utterly opposed to each other,—the DIVINE PLAN OF SALVATION, AND THE HUMAN. But while the former maintains its unity, the latter exhibits countless diversities. God has appointed a certain method of recovery from a universal spiritual disease, which is to be adopted by the afflicted children of men. Of this many are ignorant; while it is objected to

by others, who know of its existence, but who imagine they can improve upon God's plan, and who deliberately turn from that which he has marked out, and propose others. We shall see, as we proceed, the necessity for abiding by the instructions of Heaven, and turning a deaf ear to the false teachings of earth.

Among all nations, with scarcely a solitary exception, there has been found the inward consciousness of sin, and along with it the necessity for something to be done to propitiate the being or beings who are believed to have the right and the power to take cognizance of sin. But men differ widely as to the methods of propitiation. The language of the prophet Micah*—"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"—may be regarded as the embodied thoughts of many nations. Among them, with much that is

* Chap. vi. 6, 7.

fearful to contemplate, there are yet fragments of truths found, which seem to indicate, nay, to prove, their descent from the primeval race who possessed a knowledge of the promises of God, and an acquaintance with the ceremonial observances, which were designed to keep in the minds of men continual expectations of the coming Deliverer. But none of these methods have ever possessed the power to quiet the perturbed conscience, to hush the fears of the spirit within, whenever gleams of the true character of God flashed in upon the thick darkness that surrounded it. A longing desire, a hope scarcely breathed to the soul itself, has ever indicated its solemn conviction that something yet was wanting. But what or whence they knew not. Obscure hints were all they possessed. Would the morning ever break in upon the dismal gloom of that thick night?

The Syrian, not content with the expression of his dissatisfaction with Elisha, because he had not come forth to meet him, and, as he expected, to heal him with his touch, next finds fault with the specific instruction he had given him, to "go and wash in Jordan seven times." "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damas-

cus, better than all the waters of Israel?" he asks, "May I not wash in them and be clean?"

Perhaps Naaman might be excused for thinking and speaking highly of these rivers, and esteeming them more than the waters of Israel. He knew that to them the plain in which the city stood owed its exceeding beauty and fertility, for it was fair and glorious as the garden of the Lord. Indeed, the Damascenes asserted that their city was built on the very site of Eden, so lovely is the spot, and so different is the scenery here, from the sterility and desolation which at a short distance reign supreme. This difference, there can be little doubt, is solely caused by the absence in the one case, and the presence in the other, of life-giving and refreshing waters. Fed by the snows of Lebanon, these streams flowed through the midst of the valley, flashing like lines of molten silver, amid olive and citron groves; while a carpet of the richest verdure spread from their banks to a considerable distance on either side. In the city itself they supplied innumerable fountains, whose diamond showers scattered a delicious coolness over the sultry air, so that they were as much objects of utility

as of beauty to the inhabitants of the place. Abana and Pharpar had certainly much to do with making this, the most ancient city of the world, worthy of the name by which the orientals describe it, "a pearl surrounded by emeralds;" and hence, apart from the circumstances before us, it ought not to excite great surprise, nor awaken animadversion, that Naaman should cherish and avow such an extraordinary esteem for them.

But the preference which is here given to them, to the depreciation of the waters of Jordan, must be regarded rather as an exhibition of waywardness and caprice; and his language as the hasty ebullition of a petulant spirit, losing sight of its best interests in the gratification of an uncontrolled temper. Even admitting the vaunted superiority of the rivers of Damascus over that of Israel—though that might be questioned—still as that was the command of the prophet, at whose hands he had sought restoration to health, it was unwise, and might be perilous to object. Of what moment could it be to him that Jordan was to have the honour of his recovery, rather than Abana and Pharpar, so long as he actually did recover? Besides this, the river in which

he was instructed to wash was nigh at hand, and the object for which he had come into the land of Israel might be at once attained; whereas, if he waited until he returned to his own country, he must certainly for some time continue to bear his oppressive burden. There is reason to fear that the dissatisfied spirit which was at work in Naaman's bosom would have led him as much to object to the rivers of Damascus, if they had been named by the prophet, as the place of ablution, as he did to the waters of Jordan.

The whole matter resolves itself into this: God, by his prophet, had proposed a plan different from that which Naaman had expected. Disappointment, wounded pride, vexation, anger, all these exercised an unholy influence over him. He objects to the divine method;—he refers with a species of self-satisfaction to that of his own. *He* must have the ordering of things; *he* must have the choice of the mode, and the selection of the agents, and his national and personal vanity must be gratified; and because this is not to be allowed, reckless of the consequences of so doing, he turns away in a rage. The fact that he was setting at nought the expressed com-

mands of God does not appear to be even thought of by him; much less seriously considered. Yet this he was doing; and in that act was committing one of the most heinous and dangerous transgressions of which a man can be guilty.

Thus far, it appears as if Naaman were in a worse condition than he was before he sought the aid of the prophet. A gleam of hope had then shone upon his path, kindling in his soul the most lively expectations; but that radiance seemed as if for ever quenched, making the darkness that had afterwards fallen upon his spirit more intense and unendurable. But then for all this disappointment he had to thank himself. The boon he sought had been held out to him; but with a prodigality of folly he had put it from him. It comes not in the form he expected, and so it is hastily refused. He stands upon idle punctilios, and by so doing places in jeopardy his highest interests. One hardly knows which to censure most, the ingratitude he displays towards one who, though a stranger, had so kindly and readily interested himself in the promotion of his welfare; or the supreme foolishness of rejecting, for the childish causes named, the proffered invaluable blessing.

We have again, in these transactions, an illustration of a case, alas! too commonly met with. God calls to man, infected with the leprosy of sin, and kindly and graciously inquires, "Wilt thou be made whole?" It may be that a humiliating consciousness of the existence of the spiritual disease, unmistakable and most painful evidences of its deleterious effects upon the human soul, and too well founded apprehensions of its fatal consequences, may all be present to the mind of man, when thus the Divine Father addresses him. He *would* be made whole; and to that inquiry he replies by another, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Thus far all appears favourable. There is a conviction of sin, and an intimation of a desire to know what is to be done to be freed from its consequences and power. This was the exact position of the young man in the gospel, before referred to, who asked, "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Here was a consciousness that something was required to be done, and an implied readiness to do it, when the duty was made known. But alas! it is with myriads as with him,—the terms are not satisfactory.

God replies to the anxious question, "What

must I do to be saved?" by the simple words, "BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED." The instructions of Heaven to the spiritual leper are, "Go to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, welling up at the foot of the cross of Christ; wash, and be clean." Of the purifying efficacy of that fountain none need doubt, for the heavenly oracle has declared, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." God tells us that, for his Son's sake, he pardoneth all that truly repent, and who seek forgiveness through the merits of his death. We are required to believe the words of God in relation to this matter, and are assured that "he that believeth shall be saved."

Now let it be observed that the sinner—the spiritual leper—is, like Naaman of old, commanded to perform a simple act of faith. *He* was told that if he washed in Jordan seven times, he should be clean. If he *believed* the words of the prophet, he would *do* so, and become clean. His faith, as we have before intimated, would be followed by the cure, which

depended entirely, so far as man was concerned —and that is all with which we have to do— upon the exercise of that faith.

We are told that if we look to Jesus as the Saviour of sinners, and, believing in the fact of his death for sin, ask God, for the sake of that death, to pardon our guilt,—as that is his appointed plan,—HE WILL. If we believe the words of God with reference to this matter, we *shall* so look, and so pray; and so shall be assuredly saved.

Now, it is very easy for those who are more intent upon cavilling and carping, than upon securing the everlasting salvation of their souls, to object: "Well, but there appears to be no connexion, that we can see, between looking, either with the bodily or the mental eye, to Jesus, and having our sins forgiven. The belief of the fact, that Christ came to earth and died, cannot surely annul the record of the fact that we have sinned, or alter the character of sin as committed by us. We are the transgressors. Must there not, therefore, be something done by *ourselves* to make amends for our sin? We can understand how *our* doing or enduring may turn to our benefit; but we cannot see how the consequences of the acts of

another can be made to bear upon us for good. We think every man must stand or fall by himself; and that external help, from any source whatever, is simply a moral impossibility."

Now, waiving the fact, that the consequences of the acts of another—the first Adam—have been made to bear upon us for *evil*—and that is a perfectly analogous case—to all these objections there is one sufficient reply: Whether we trace connexions or not, between the acts of duty enjoined and the promised results, God has commanded the duty, and ensured the reward. This is his plan—"Look! believe! and be saved!" All the reasoning, and all the sophistry in the world, will not alter the fact, that so he has commanded, that so he has promised.

In his infinite goodness and wisdom he has appended the positive assurance of forgiveness to the exercise of faith in his words. The former invariably follows the latter. If we know this, why need we trouble ourselves about the rationale of the thing? IT IS SO; that is enough.

There is related in the early history of the Jews,* a most striking incident, which occurred

* Num. xxi. 8, 9.

in the wilderness, illustrative of the very point to which we have been adverting. Israel was bitten by fiery serpents, and dismay and death spread rapidly through the camp. At this critical juncture Moses was commanded by God to make a fiery serpent of brass, and set it upon a pole; "And it shall come to pass," was the gracious promise, "that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole; and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived."

Now an objector of that day might have said, with as much show of reason as modern ones have, and even more, "Of what avail is it for men, with the poison of these reptiles rushing through their veins, to turn towards a lifeless object, like that which Moses has reared in the sight of the camp? What virtue can flow from that piece of brass, that shall stay the deadly effects everywhere visible among these writhing and agonized forms? Would it not be far better that some antidote should be administered, that might act directly upon the physical frame, and so neutralize the effects of the poison, and promote the cure? But to believe that a

look—for that is all that the patriarch commands, that a look shall be followed by the cessation of the disease, and the return to health—why the thing is preposterous, it cannot so be." Such we can easily conceive might have been the oracular utterances of those who were wise in their own conceits in that day.

Now does not every one perceive that the cases are perfectly analogous? So indeed they are represented by the Great Teacher, who, when speaking to Nicodemus, said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." To the ancient as to the modern objector, the unanswerable reply would have been, "This is the method of recovery ordered by Him who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working; and whatever inability you may feel to trace a connexion between the look directed to the serpent of brass and recovery, God has ordained that such a look *shall be* followed by restoration." And the sacred historian expressly tells us, that "it came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any

man, when he BEHELD the serpent of brass he LIVED."

Why need we linger about the physics or metaphysics of the thing? Here are the facts, and one well attested fact is worth a thousand arguments.

One feature of God's plan—and it is very noticeable—is this; that that which he now enjoins upon man, as necessary to be done by him to ensure salvation, is very simple and easy. He is not perplexed by a multitude of directions, from which he is to make a choice which he will attend to. *One thing is enjoined,* one unchanging answer given to every inquirer, no matter what his position or character; "Believe, and be saved." Is not this one of the excellencies of the gospel? So Paul evidently considered it, and writing to the Romans, in effect tells them,* that the justification of the gospel—man's being dealt with by God as if he were just—does not depend upon some mighty deeds being performed by him; he is not commanded to scale the heavens, or plunge to the silent depths of the mighty sea; neither many nor difficult things are set before him to be done. "But what saith the

* Rom. x. 6—13.

scripture? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Believing and calling are here used as synonymous terms. One thing only is inculcated, though two different words are employed. Both express the same mental and moral action, FAITH.

Now again we assert this is God's plan, and they are the truly wise who utterly refuse to try any other.

But many still object; they think that salvation may be, or might have been, effected in some other way. Their pride is wounded; first, because they are told that God receives them, blesses them, saves them, through the merits of

another, and not their own; that all their excellency goes for nothing, in the scale of justification; that it is not even to be named before God: and next, because all men are placed upon a level, in the scheme of redemption; because there is no distinction between the worst and the best,—no respect of persons with God. All we have to reply is, "This is God's plan;" and these things mentioned as objections constitute, we believe, in the estimation of every right-thinking mind, some of its most transcendent excellencies.

Some complain of being confined to this method. They want to be permitted to make trial, whether by a constant adherence to the rules of morality, by generosity to the poor, or by a scrupulous attention to ritual observances, they might not secure heaven. We can only reply, "That is *not* God's plan."

Some, admitting the facts of the gospel narrative, will even go so far as to find fault with the divine arrangements, as they are placed before us in the New Testament. "Why," say they, "should God give his Son to die, and under circumstances so painful and affecting? Why could he not have ordained otherwise?" And so they go on from questioning the wisdom

and goodness of Jehovah, till they end in denying the sacrificial character of the death of Christ altogether. There is very little hope of those who set themselves up against "the only wise God;" who dare to arraign him at the bar of their fallible judgment; who talk as if they knew better than he does what is right, what is most in accordance with the requirements of his holy law, and what is likely most powerfully to affect the intelligent universe. Such must be left to themselves, until a little less presumption, and a little more modesty and self-diffidence take possession of their minds. No wonder that such persons turn away from the preacher who insists upon these truths, and charge him with folly and fanaticism. So the Master has forewarned us: "These things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor me."

But as Elisha altered not one word of his message because of its unpalatableness, and took no notice of the unwise and ungrounded anger of Naaman, but left him to his own reflections, or the advice of others upon the matter; so God alters not one iota of the gospel plan, nor dare his ministers. He is

indifferent to the anger or opposition of men, so far as He is concerned. He pities them—as witness the tears wept over Jerusalem—and contents himself with simply and calmly reiterating the solemn and startling alternatives, "He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." On the former hangs the bliss of an eternal heaven; on the latter the woe of an everlasting hell.

Let us never forget that the Abana and Pharpar of men's own righteousness have no healing efficacy to restore their souls; but at the same time remember, "there is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High." This rises, as we have already pointed out, at the foot of the cross, and draws thence the sanitary and restorative virtues that make it cleanse the soul from all sin, and preserve it alive in spiritual health and beauty. On its banks are seen myriads of the children of men; some to whom the leprosy yet clings, who are fearful, but anxious to wash and be clean. Yet to them is the encouraging invitation continually given:

"Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore,

Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, joined with power.
He is able,
He is willing: doubt no more."

Others are there who have tested the efficacy of the waters, and linger near with generous intentions to invite and encourage others to do as they have done. Many voices are there heard crying,—

"Venture on Him, venture wholly,
Let no other trust intrude.
None but Jesus
Can do helpless sinners good."

Oh that all smitten with the leprosy that is consuming their souls would come! Here, and here only is to be found the remedy from their disease. Let them beware how they listen to plausible seducing doctrines that draw away from Christ, whether they have the origin in their own hearts, or are borne to them from the widely extended domain of superstition. There are in the world, as has been shown, many human systems, professing to be systems of salvation. They are useless, and worse than useless; impudent impostures, undeserving of attention. Let none be misled by them.

There is but ONE that bears the stamp of heaven. That plan, and no other, must be tried. IT cannot by any possibility fail! The truth of Heaven is pledged to its success. ployed, in effectuating that deliverance; and GOD'S PLAN, AND NOT MAN'S: SALVATION BY GRACE, AND NOT WORKS; THROUGH THE MERITS OF CHRIST, AND NOT OUR OWN. This must be our motto; this our creed.

LECTURE IV.

COUNSELS OF THOUGHT—THE REWARD OF OBEDIENCE.

2 KINGS v. 13, 14.

ONE of the mournful complaints, which Jehovah was constrained so frequently to make of his people of old, is equally applicable to men in the present day: "Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." There are found, among the majority of mankind, the two extremes, of a lamentable and affecting indifference to matters of everlasting moment, or, the exhibition of a hasty and impulsive spirit, in relation to them, leading to vague generalizations, and incautious judgments. The former exists among those by whom the shame and peril of their degraded spiritual condition is unknown, or disbelieved; who have no disposition to make themselves familiar with the solemn teachings of the Spirit of God on this subject, or to surrender their souls to the impression of unwelcome truths; which, however unwelcome, it is of the highest importance

to know. The latter often displays itself when the light of conviction flashes in most terribly upon the awakened and alarmed soul, and all the tremendous consequences of its guilt, present and future, stand before it, in startling and dread array.

Now, both the indifference and the hastiness are wrong; but not equally so; and the same inequality exists in their respective consequences. The former unquestionably is the most to be deprecated, as the evils springing from it constitute a progeny far more numerous and mischievous than those which the latter brings forth. There is more hope of a man who holds false opinions on matters of religion, than of one who will not give himself the trouble to form any opinions at all. You may place what you believe to be truth, and hold as such, side by side with what you know to be error, as held by another, and solicit his consideration of both, with some hope that he will comply with your request, and that the juxta-position of the opposite sentiments may lead to the perception of the true, and the renunciation of the false, on the part of him who has been in the wrong. But what can be done with the man who holds all opinions on matters

of religion to be alike good; but will not take the trouble to form any specific one for himself; who does not think, and does not want to think, upon what is to him an unpleasant and unattractive subject? "There is more hope of a fool than of him."

Men appear to do despite to their own intellectual nature, when this indifference is exhibited. Endowed with the god-like faculties of reflection, by which they are distinguished from all other beings on earth, they are bound to exercise them on all matters pertaining to their welfare. But this duty becomes doubly imperative in relation to those subjects which belong to the soul and its eternal interests. Now man has not the excuse that he is desirous thus to exercise thought upon these high matters, but finds himself in a sea of bewilderment, with no compass by which to steer his course. He cannot assert that he has no sure data from which to proceed, and no help in the conduct of any argument which he might desire to pursue, on subjects of such vital moment as those that relate to his spiritual and immortal nature. For God has given to man materials for the highest thought, in the volume of inspiration—that wondrous record of

the Divine mind, communicated expressly for the instruction and guidance of that portion of his vast family that has placed itself in an isolated position, and cut itself off from a more direct intercourse with the great Father, by the commission of sin. The truths presented here have all the grandeur and solemnity of eternity about them, while they are invested with the additional attraction of being meant expressly for us, and for us personally. They do not relate, except incidentally, to other beings in far distant worlds, but have a specific reference to the dwellers upon this earth; to all—to each; for when man takes with him into his closet the divine book, and through that medium communes there with his Maker, God speaks to him in those wondrous, burning words which flame in every page, as if he, of all his numerous children in creation, were the only one left to be addressed.

We are bound, therefore, to ponder, with deep seriousness and unaffected concern, such revelations of his will as he has been pleased to make; to bring to bear upon them the full play of our noblest powers; and to remember that they claim and deserve—both on account of their own intrinsic importance, and because

our souls' present and everlasting happiness is bound up with them—the highest and most laborious efforts of the mind. Of all subjects, matters of religion are too momentous to be dismissed summarily. He who only skims the surface of the waters of truth, is not likely to obtain the precious pearls that reward him who penetrates to their hidden depths. But besides this, in the plan of redemption, as revealed in the gospel, there are some things set before us which are offensive to proud human nature, and from which at the first glance we may feel inclined to turn away. It becomes therefore especially necessary that we abstain from that foolish and hasty rejection, which too often takes place when these offensive peculiarities are at first recognized; and that there should be a calm and lengthened consideration of these truths, not as heard from the lips of others—for, with the most transparent honesty of purpose in men to represent them faithfully, it is possible to fail in so doing; but we must ponder over them as they are revealed in God's own book, in words "which the Holy Ghost teacheth,"—"the sure word of prophecy, to which we do well to take heed, as to a light shining in a dark place," whose steadily

streaming radiance never once misdirected the thoughtful, humble, inquiring soul.

In the case of Naaman we have already seen that the directions given by Elisha were very mortifying to his personal pride, and opposed to his nationality, as a Syrian. Instead however of deliberately reflecting upon a matter which involved consequences so serious to himself, and considering whether it was not possible for him to be wrong, in the preconceived notions he had cherished, he yielded to the impulse of an ungoverned spirit, impatient of the least opposition to its wishes, and at once refused compliance with the prophet's command. The counsels of thought were wanting in Naaman, at a time when the exercise thereof was of the highest importance.

The Syrian however, happily for himself, was surrounded by sensible and faithful servants — apparently confidential ones — who looked upon the present posture of affairs, which they saw had reached a crisis, with a much more calm and correct appreciation of the real state of the case than their master did. These attendants of Naaman appear to have cherished something of a filial affection towards him,

as is evident both by the appellation they bestowed upon him, when they addressed him, and the lively interest they felt and manifested in his welfare. Such close attachments between masters and servants were very common among the orientals, and were accompanied by a more frank and familiar mode of intercourse and speech than suits the frigid notions that now prevail in this part of the world.

These men thought for their master, and set before him in words of respectful tenderness and remonstrance—yet conveying a tone of reproof which it was hard to avoid—the exceeding folly of his conduct. They gave him materials for thought, and, by the spirit and tenor of their address, besought him to use them to a wise purpose. Conversant with the whole affair, and knowing how long the disease whose cure he sought had darkened his daily paths, how successfully it had baffled all the remedial means that human skill could devise in attempting to remove it, it seemed to their unprejudiced minds the very height of infatuation, that Naaman should offer the slightest objection to the proposed plan, which he was positively assured should, if he faithfully followed it, issue in recovery. This refusal, too,

appeared to them to be still more extraordinary and inexplicable, when they reflected on the conditions which the prophet had enjoined—so simple, so capable of performance, "Go, wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." How plain the injunction!—how easy the observance! how unequivocal and positive the promise!

With much surprise therefore "his servants came near, and spake unto him and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?"

Perhaps there was a deeper meaning in their words than they themselves designed to attach to them, or even discerned. To have been bidden to do some great thing would have been rather gratifying than otherwise to a proud heart, that resents an entire dependence upon another, like that which the gospel enjoins, and which renders nugatory and valueless all it can do itself. It would have pleased such a spirit as that which Naaman possessed to have been able to say, that the might of his arm, or the skill of his hand, or the profundity of his

wisdom, or the power of his influence, had availed to bring back health to his enfeebled frame. But such an occasion for self-glorying was not to be afforded him. It was one of God's great designs, with reference to him, to abase his haughty spirit, and clothe it in the garment of a modest humility; to make him "as humble as a very child."

The servants of Naaman dwelt simply upon the perfect ease with which the conditions of Elisha might be observed; and it was utterly impossible for him to gainsay the truth and force of their words, or to offer any reply to their remonstrances, except by an acknowledgment of his inexcusable folly. He doubtless now took counsel of his own thoughts, and reflection made him a wiser, though perhaps a sadder man. If no acknowledgment of being in the wrong was made in words, — for none are recorded—he certainly made one by his actions, as the narrative proceeds to show.

He soon cooled down from the fever heat of his uncontrolled passion; the storm of rage that had spread itself over his soul gradually passed away; the remonstrances of his attached domestics were felt to be sensible and

just, and the gracefully concealed rebuke most deserved. Perhaps too, the absurdity of objecting to any terms that could, with a particle of propriety, be complied with, after all he had endured, and after undertaking that journey expressly for the purpose of obtaining a cure,—of which fact most likely all Syria was apprized —would present itself forcibly to his mind; and the ridiculous light in which his objections would appear to others, should he return unhealed, had most likely some influence upon him, in awaking him to a sense of his reckless folly. Besides, the fact would press itself very strongly on his mind, that he was putting away from him the last hope of recovery, which had certainly dawned upon him with a clear effulgence, and which, if now beclouded, had become so by the mists which the tempest raging in his own heart had created. All these things combined together to cast down the barriers which pride had reared; and to lead to the adoption of a line of conduct that proclaimed the renewal of the reign of reflection, and of the triumph of sober thought.

"Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again

like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

That must have been a time of intense and almost painful interest, both to Naaman and his servants, while he was performing the ordained ablutions. The thought would not improbably cross his mind, that his hasty refusal, at the first, to follow the directions of the prophet, might have invalidated the promise; and the tardy act of obedience which he at length discharged,—not with the spontaneity of a heart that needs no other stimulant than the knowledge of the will of God, but as one urged on by the remonstrances and reproaches of others,—might be altogether in vain. With almost breathless silence, and with not a little of the feeling of awe, must he have stooped beneath the waters of Jordan, and his servants have eagerly watched his movements from its banks. As each ablution brought him nearer to the last, we may easily conceive that the excitement of all parties would be raised to the highest pitch; and when for the seventh time he rose from beneath the stream, which to him doubtless, at that time of imperfect knowledge, was supposed to possess a mystic virtue, it must have been with a quick beating heart

and a flashing eye, that he glanced at his flesh, to observe what effect had been produced by his obedience "to the saying of the man of God." And lo! every vestige of that loathsome disease had vanished. "His flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

Mighty must have been the rush of feeling through the depths of his soul in that exulting hour; the emotions of surprise, delight, and gratitude for his recovery would be felt, mingled with much of self-reproach, that he had ever doubted, and cavilled, or ever contemned the words of the prophet, and the commands of his God. The hopes, the deep-cherished desire of years, had at length been accomplished. The stigma that had clung to him, and which was silently consuming his soul; which not all the success he had gained in his profession, nor the multitude of honours which had been heaped upon him by his master, nor all the applause he had won from the people could make him forget, was now removed; and on the banks of that very stream, whose waters he had so recently contemptuously despised, he stood, a signal monument of the power and goodness and forbearance of the God of Israel.

Here was a rich reward of obedience to a

divine command; to which he was led by the wise and judicious counsels, the unanswerable and well-directed rebuke, of affectionate servants. Happy and honoured they who had the skill and the boldness to do this difficult duty, and to do it so well! But happier far the master who had the wisdom and good sense not to resent their fidelity, though it wounded his self-love; but quietly to follow their advice, the true value of which he speedily realized.

Of all the many mercies which a beneficent Creator scatters in our path, a judicious, sensible, faithful friend, is not one of the least. From what acts of folly has such an one preserved us! The words of warning, the well-timed rebuke, the earnest and impassioned appeal to our highest interests, have arrested us at the critical moment, when another step in advance would have hurled us down the dizzy precipice of destruction; at whose foot lie the bleached skeletons of myriads, on whose ears the voice of remonstrance never fell, or came too late to avert the catastrophe that overtook them. For such a friend the heart can never be sufficiently thankful to its God.

It is well known that many demur to the

plan of the gospel. On this subject some remarks were made at the close of the last Lecture, and the objections considered were met by the statement—unanswerably true, if the Bible is admitted as conclusive evidence—"It is God's plan; and the New Testament utterly and emphatically repudiates all others."

It is not my design in this place to adopt a similar mode of dealing with objectors, but rather, in the spirit and with the same intention that the servants of Naaman evidenced, to remonstrate with such, kindly and faithfully, on the unwiseness of their proceedings.

It has already been shown, that of the several interesting and important features which the gospel scheme of salvation presents, not the least attractive are the simple and easy terms on which its inestimable benefits are to be obtained. Singularly enough, this very simplicity and facility have excited the gravest doubts in the minds of many; awakened in others the opposition of the unregenerate heart; and, in some instances, led to the rejection of the divine plan.

Some cannot believe that a boon of such magnitude, a gift of such inestimable value, as eternal life, can be made to depend upon a

compliance with these plain conditions. They refuse to accept the plan of the gospel, for this reason—a most extraordinary one—*it is so simple and easy.* They cannot believe that a blessing, with which all the good things of earth cannot for a moment bear a comparison, will ever be realized by man, except at some corresponding cost, to be met by himself. The rule of arithmetic, however, has never yet been discovered, by which that corresponding cost is to be ascertained. They know that the scholar or the artist cannot gain a name without immense labour; that the soldier and the senator reach the pinnacle of earthly greatness only by almost Herculean efforts; that a fortune, if obtained by a man himself, is the result of years of unremitted toil and attention to business; but here is the greatest bestowment of God, next to that of his own Son—EVERLASTING LIFE—said to be promised "without money, and without price," without works, or personal excellence, on the sole condition that man believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, as God's own Son, and the appointed Saviour of the world, and follows him.

They cannot receive this statement; it is too wonderful; nothing was ever heard like it. Is

not this one reason why the statement *should* be listened to, and the credentials as to its truthfulness pondered? Has not God said, "My ways are not your ways, nor my thoughts your thoughts?" It *is* unlike man; but, as the poor Christian Hindoo woman said, when asked by a missionary if the love of God was not wonderful, "No, sir; it is just LIKE HIM." It may not be amiss again to refer to it as an indisputable fact, which every page of the New Testament corroborates, that this is the only plan which God has ordained; and we shall presently show that in so doing he has displayed his usual wisdom and beneficence.

To all who pursue the extraordinary course of rejecting the commands of God, his servants may say, "But if He had bid you do some great thing to secure heaven, would you not do it?" And, strange as at first sight it may appear, they have on all sides a host of affirmative replies; not in words, but in the actions of multitudes, who are all attempting some great things, with the vague, undefined, half-doubting hope, that they will be acceptable to God. How, otherwise, can we interpret the extraordinary phenomenon of men, who, naturally shrinking from pain, subject themselves

to terrible torturing penances, by which body and soul are afflicted; forsake the businesses of life, and undertake long and weary pilgrimages to shrines and cities of reputed sanctity, in the paths to which are seen the deluded victims of these fatal superstitions sinking by myriads to earth, to die? How else can we account for the devotion of incredible sums, the appropriation of vast estates, to so-called religious purposes, to the utter neglect and often total ruin of nearest and dearest relatives; when the whole life of the donor, up to the hour of his gift, has been one mighty crime, scarcely relieved by a deed of mercy, or beneficence, or purity, or respect for truth and God; and whose subsequent career is a perfect caricature of repentance, and a vile and impious mockery of holiness? These things show that there is a strange readiness in man, at the bidding of another, who is supposed to be invested with the authority of God, to do "some great thing," to ensure salvation. But I need not attempt to prove to you that God has *never* delegated to an *uninspired* and fallible creature any portion of his authority whatever, and that none are warranted to legislate in the church of God who cannot lay claim to inspiration;

nor need I add that we search in vain through the pages of the word of God for any injunction that could be tortured into a justification of such monstrous follies as have been perpetrated in the name of religion, and under the sanction and direction of the professed teachers of truth.

With what readiness these things are done—when men in their ignorance, misled by those who know better, imagine they are doing God service—the whole history of that huge fabric of mingled falsehood and truth—the Romish system—loudly proclaims.

Now beneath all this festering mass of error, there must be found, underlying, something of truth—some mighty impulsive thought or desire, that has its origin in stern and deeply-felt realities, and that suffices to urge on to these things. That seems to be—a conception of the unutterable value of the soul, and a deep sense of the magnitude, and worth, and necessity of its salvation from the ruin that is felt to be impending; of which deep voices within seem to speak in solemn tones, and faint echoes floating from the temple of truth, even where it is most in ruins, tend to confirm. Shut out partially from the clear sunlight of the gospel, dwelling only in the dim cave of

superstition, where every thing of a religious nature is represented in a distorted and unnatural aspect and form, and the mind, deprived of its own freedom, is a ready prey to any one that by force or fraud obtains an undue ascendency over it; no wonder that men resort to all such supposititious modes of quieting a disturbed conscience. When, as we have said, the directions to do so come from those to whom they have been accustomed to look for guidance, and whose dicta they regard as next to inspired, the probability is that those things will be done willingly; devotees being sustained, even under most oppressive and wearisome penances, by the hope of thereby winning everlasting life. There is too much of earnestness in all they do and endure to doubt their sincerity; while their folly is too broad and transparent to admit the belief of their possession of much wisdom, and still less of a correct knowledge of the truth of God. Alas! for men, when their teachers are either ignorant of the way of life themselves, or, knowing it, maintain a gross imposition.

Had God required these things, we can easily conceive what a storm of opposition men would have raised against them, and what doubts would have been cast on His beneficence and

goodness, in exacting from his creatures such terrible penalties. Where men do believe that such observances have been commanded by God, whether he be worshipped under Christian or heathen forms, whether the devotees bow at Rome or Benares, it is impossible that any affectionate veneration for his character can be cherished. That character is presented to them with features so repellent, that attraction is out of the question; fear—dread—there may be, but the moral elements, that constitute the real esteem and devout attachment which are cherished by holy angels and enlightened Christians towards God, must be utterly absent. Thus the Ever-Blessed and All-Merciful One is robbed of the honour which heaven and earth should render, and which they would surely be ready to do if they perfectly understood his adorable character. When the lustre of his perfections, as a God, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin, without requiring some great thing from the sinner, is seen;—when the transcendent love of God rises on the soul of man, in the wondrous manifestations of the cross, then goes forward a spiritual process, the issue of which proclaims itself in the avowal, "We love him, because he first loved us."

Now that God has required nothing of the kind referred to, is known to every babe in Christ. Whatever judicial penalties may have been rendered necessary for the vindication of his law before the intelligent universe, and to make the exercise of mercy towards the transgressor harmonize with the other attributes of Jehovah, these were laid upon Christ. "He bare our sins in his own body on the tree; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." God would not minister to the pride and arrogance of man,—already enough inflated—by ordaining that any thing should be done by him, that might be construed by a self-exalting spirit into something praiseworthy. He resolved that no flesh should glory in his presence, in relation to the matter of redemption; but that all the honour of saving a perishing world should be His who, "with his own right hand, and holy arm, hath gotten the victory."

Besides, God with gracious kindness regards the whole of the vast family of man. He knows that if a few were able to do some great thing, that would not be the case with all; and that such a method of forgiving man would necessarily exclude multitudes from the bless-

ings of salvation. He therefore has ordained a plan that meets the case of all, without any exception; one as simple as it is profound and sublime, and most capable of universal adaptation; admirably suited to the capacities and circumstances of man, and most honourable to the perfections of God; one which can be understood and received by the meanest as well as the mightiest intellect; and that utterly excludes all pretensions to self-righteousness; one which, while it invests God with an excellent glory, and appropriately exalts his transcendent grace, places man in his proper position, and constrains all to reiterate the self-renouncing sentiment of the apostle, "By grace are we saved, through faith; and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast."

God sends to every one the momentous message, "Believe, and be saved." Saved, he is told, without *his* works, *his* merits, *his* money, *his* penances. Yet, let it be remembered, not saved without *any* works, or *any* merits, or *any* price, or *any* suffering. There ever floats from Gethsemane and Calvary a still small voice, like that of a departing spirit, that forbids this supposition: "The Son of man came to give his

life a ransom for many." There is learned the solemn truth, which the apostle Peter shaped into the striking words, "Ye are not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish, and without spot;" the costliest offering the universe ever witnessed; at the presentation of which, heaven grew dark, and earth trembled, and the foundations of nature were out of course; a sacrificial propitiation which angels beheld with trembling awe, but which the eternal justice of a holy God required.

Now again we assert, it is passing strange that any one should offer objections to the way in which God redeems a dying world, because the method of redemption, so far as man is personally concerned, is comparatively easy. Should not this fact be rather one of its choicest recommendations, and awaken in the hearts of men the most ardent and devout gratitude to God? Should the feeling of wounded pride, because of the evident disavowal of human excellence, in the fact that man is called upon to do nothing in the effectuation of the plan of redemption, blind him to the truth that there is infinite mercy in all this, for he *could*

do nothing? God deals with him according to the measure of his smitten moral capacities, as well as according to the good pleasure of his own will.

Happily many, who at the first manifested great repugnance and opposition to the plan of the gospel, have, when reflection has been indulged—when they have taken counsel of thought upon the subject,—been constrained to disavow their hostility, acknowledge their error, and cordially embrace the scheme. By the indispensable aid of the glass of revelation they see that it is a wise and wondrous plan, meeting the necessities of the creature, and vindicating the righteous claims of the Creator. By this scheme man is helped by another—a Divine Friend—in the very circumstances in which he could not help himself; a satisfaction being provided for his guilt, which he was unable of himself to furnish; while in it, in the most extraordinary manner, are apparent contrarieties harmonized: God glorifies his justice, honours his holiness, and magnifies his mercy. There is embodied in this scheme the truth, which was so symbolically and magnificently set before the mind of the apostle John, in Patmos: "I was in the Spirit; and behold,

a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald:" the jasper, with its crystal purity, symbolizing the holiness of God; the sardine, with its glowing red, his justice; and the emerald rainbow, the mercy of God, which over-arches and embraces the other two perfections. So, at length, when the whole scheme in its perfectness flashes upon the soul, it is irresistibly constrained to exclaim, "O! the depths of the riches both of the knowledge and wisdom of God! Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. He hath done all things well."

When the gospel is thus recognized as excellent, and received by the heart, that acknowledges it to be "the power of God unto salvation," the soul realizes "joy and peace in believing, and abounds in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost." It is restored to the favour of God, and now dwells beneath the beaming smile of the Divine Father. That which excluded from his presence and friendship before, that deadly leprosy which neces-

sarily shut him out from the Holy One, who "is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," is removed, as soon as the heart welcomes the Saviour, whose blood applied to the smitten soul takes away all its guilt.

Joyous is that hour when the soul at length feels itself free from the fetters of sin—when its curse is averted and its power is broken. The cloud that flung its gloomy shadow over all life's paths has vanished away, and now bright and gladdening sunshine streams around. The sweet low music that breathes from the soul, whose myriad chords thrill with divinest sounds of holy joy, is heard and echoed by the angels of God, from whose harps float the answering strains that tell how deeply heaven sympathizes with the joys and sorrows of earth.

Happy are they, who, though their pride and prejudices are at first shocked by the faithful and searching expositions of the ministers of Christ, and who are offended at their directions, nevertheless study the Scriptures to see if their statements are borne out; to ascertain if they themselves have been brought up in the maintenance of errors,—have been taught or thought wrong; and who honestly desire to know the way of God more perfectly, that they

may walk therein. One of the most striking and encouraging declarations of the Great Teacher is addressed to this class of hearers and readers; —"If any man will do his will (God's), he shall know of the doctrine." To take counsel of God's word with this disposition and desire, is sure to be attended by the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit. Such "shall know the truth, and the truth shall make them free," from doubts, and errors, and fatal unbelief. This sentiment cannot be too strongly insisted upon, especially in the hearing of those who, with undisguised dislike of the sacred volume, find fault with what they are pleased to term its mystical and inexplicable character; who say they can make nothing of it, but who are of that class whom Paul describes "as ever learning, and yet never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." It is, however, as incontrovertible evidence proves, plain to him that readeth with a humble heart; and though many things are "hidden from the wise and prudent," yet are they, in condescension and mercy, "revealed unto babes."

Thrice happy they who perceive the error of rejecting the plan of God before it is too late, and who, amid the beaming splendours of

gospel truth, discover the vanity of all other schemes of deliverance, and recognize the stamp of the Eternal hand, the Divine seal and superscription upon that which the gospel presents; who—under the irresistible conviction wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit, blessing the use of the means of grace, public and private—at length go whither the finger of revelation points, and present themselves at the only spot in creation where the removal of the leprosy of sin can be effected—the Calvary of the cross; and in the stream that rises thence seek that baptism which effectually removes all sin; who exclaim, with a rush of mingled emotions,—

"To the dear fountain of thy blood,
Incarnate God, I fly;
Here let me wash my spotted soul,
From crimes of deepest dye.
A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On thy kind arms I fall;
Be thou my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus and my all."

Let all listen to the remonstrances of the servants of Christ, or rather of Christ himself, addressed to those who hesitate or refuse to agree to the chosen plan of redemption, and

seek some other. Over the chasm of five-and-twenty centuries come floating the ever-memorable words of the prophet, "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."

Let the most fearful be encouraged by the assurance that implicit obedience to the words of God will be followed by restoration. Let the most timid know that God despiseth not any. If—as poor and helpless, and all-dependent upon the Divine Saviour, not waiting until they have accumulated a stock of excellence, on which they may venture to place some reliance, —men seek God, there is not only nothing in his character or declarations to discourage, but every thing to cheer them with the assurance of acceptance. In the following lines there are well expressed the true sentiments that must actuate the penitent sinner's heart; and, these possessed, there is no room for despair:—

"Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfil thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,

These for sins could not atone ;
Thou must save, and thou alone.
In my hand no price I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling."

The words of the Son of God himself, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out," are so positive and assuring, that for any one to despair, while those words are floating around him, is to do "despite unto the Spirit of grace," and to perform an act of the most suicidal folly.

LECTURE V.

GRATITUDE AND DEVOTION; OR, NAAMAN'S OFFERING, AND NAAMAN IN THE HOUSE OF RIMMON.

2 KINGS v. 15—19.

A CHANGE had passed over the mind of Naaman, as great as that which had affected his body. The revolution of mental feeling was as fully remarkable as the physical alteration which had been wrought. This was one of those sudden events which, like the miraculous conversion of Paul, does not come under the denomination of common occurrences, in the spiritual economy of God. The hour, as well as the place, of the twofold transformation which had happened to Naaman, would be vividly remembered; for there, where his leprosy was removed, for the first time the grand realities of Divine truth burst upon his soul; and the transition, from his former state of thought and feeling to another and happier one, would be as marked as that which happened in the case of the blind and the dumb, in the days of Christ,

who were suddenly restored to sight and speech.

This change soon began to develop itself. The first thoughts that arose in his mind, when he became conscious of the miracle which had been wrought upon him, was the obligation under which he was placed to the prophet, and especially to the prophet's God. His heart, swelling with the long pent up tide of emotions, was now considering how best he could testify his sense of the inestimable favour conferred upon him; and his thoughts glanced both towards the primary and secondary agents in his recovery. A right minded man will ever be ready frankly and gratefully to recognize his obligations, no matter from whom the benefits he has received have come; and in that way which appears most likely to be congenial to the bestower of the favour, and which is within the compass of the power of the recipient, will the recognition be made. Many of the sweetest and purest emotions that pass through the souls of men, as they mingle and mutually assist each other in the diversified transactions of life—where isolated independence is found to be impossible, and would be most unlovely if it were not so—are those which

the relations of giver and receiver awaken. God has wisely and graciously opened fountains of delight—even amid the wilderness of human suffering, privation, and sorrow; and while the needy and helpless have the joy of finding their necessities supplied, the beneficent heart, that has guided the bountiful hand, knows the higher and holier joy of ministering to those necessities. For we are assured, in words snatched by the apostle Paul from oblivion, and enshrined in the sacred volume—the words of the Lord Jesus—"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

"And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came and stood before him." Once more the Syrian is at the door of the prophet, and this time with very different feelings from those with which at the first he had come and departed. The haughty pride, which in mien and words had so offensively revealed itself, was no longer visible. It had been completely subdued by the exhibition of undeserved mercy, which had been displayed towards him by God. His national prejudices had been scattered to the winds by the irresistible force of recent occurrences; the

disease, that had clung to him like a robe of dishonour and degradation, was removed; the dark shadow had vanished from his path, and the gladdening gleam of unclouded sunshine rested upon him. Naaman felt happy at that hour, and grateful too; and was anxious to testify, in the best manner possible, his deep sense of the important benefits that had been conferred upon him. He seems on this visit to have entered the dwelling of Elisha, and for the first time to have met face to face the mysterious man, who wielded such marvellous powers in the midst of his people, and to whom he himself owed such a mighty debt of gratitude. No doubt the interest felt was mutual. If Naaman contemplated the man of God with mingled feelings of gratitude, curiosity, and awe, the latter would look with interest upon one who had been the subject of miraculous power, and who would bear into heathen Syria indubitable testimonies to the greatness and superiority of the God of Israel.

Then follows the unconstrained acknowledgment of the sole supremacy of Jehovah. "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." This conviction of course had been produced by the miracle.

That had spoken with a voice whose tones had sunk deep into Naaman's soul. We may well believe, that he had often sought in the temple of Rimmon for the interposition of the god on his behalf; but all his prayers and entreaties had proved unavailing. He had not improbably sought help of other gods, who might be in repute round about Syria. But all in vain. Here, however, was an illustrious display of divine power, by the God of Israel, which neither the deities of Syria or other lands could rival. So strikingly was the mind of Naaman impressed by this fact, that he avows the God of Israel to be "the only God in all the earth:" thus sweeping away from before his own mind, at one stroke, the lying vanities to which millions of men were trusting, and avowing his adoration of "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, who only hath immortality;" and who alone has the right to the undivided homage of universal humanity. This was a mighty stride for Naaman to take; at once stepping from the dark domain of deadly error into the region of celestial truth. A momentous hour that, in any man's history, when he forsakes the false and embraces the true; when his

real relations to the spiritual and eternal are clearly perceived, and manfully avowed; when the living tide of feeling, that had before chafed and fretted itself against opposing rocks, or had been lashed into foam, as storms swept over it, begins to flow on in a smooth current, and in an easy channel, and reflects in its placidity the brightness and beauty of heaven! To have found God is to have found all that the heart can desire. "For with him is the fountain of life, and in his light shall we see light."

This acknowledgment of the sole supremacy of Jehovah was made in the presence of all his company, as well as in that of the prophet. Under the pressure of his obligations this was the least he could do, to honour Him who had so graciously interposed on his behalf. "He professed a good profession before many witnesses;" and, if it were necessary, the remembrance of this fact afterwards would operate as a stimulus to the faithful maintenance of his newly embraced principles.

But besides this expression of homage to God, we find the Syrian desirous to testify his gratitude to man. The prophet had been the agent whom God had employed, to make known to him the divine commands, obedience

to which had resulted so happily to himself. To Elisha, therefore, he is anxious to offer some token of his thankfulness; which should be both an expression of the estimate which he placed upon his prophetic character, and a recognition of the personal interest he had shown in his welfare. He had brought with him "ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment," the value of which has been computed at upwards of £14,000. A part of the present, or the whole of it, he offered to the prophet. "Now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant." It is called a blessing, because the outward expression of a grateful heart, that had occasion to bless him as his benefactor, and which did not wish that benediction to be one of mere words. A similar term is employed by Jacob on the occasion of his meeting with his brother Esau,* when he offers the presents with which he desired to placate him. "Take I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God has dealt graciously with me."

Such graceful acknowledgments as these are common in all ages and places, and among all people. They are not to be judged of by their

* Gen. xxxiii. 11.

intrinsic value, though that of Naaman, as we have seen, was of great worth, but by the evident motives that dictate the presentation, and the value of the feelings of which they are merely a faint and feeble utterance.

This gift the prophet refused; and though it was urged upon him with importunity, still he persevered in his refusal, and with a solemn asseveration, that effectually precluded any further attempt on the part of Naaman to press it upon his acceptance. "He said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none."

Now Elisha was influenced by wise and holy motives in what he did. It was requisite that the part which he had taken in the striking events of the last few hours should not be misunderstood, either by Naaman or his servants; and that it should especially be seen it was not for filthy lucre the cure had been effected, but for the honour of the God of Israel, who could not be enriched by any offering of Naaman,—"for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein,"—and whose servant too could do well without it; and, to prevent misconception, most assuredly should do so. The disinterest-

edness of the servant would then appear striking, as well as the goodness of the Master. On suitable occasions, the prophet was neither forbidden nor unwilling to receive favours, as may be seen by a glance at the previous chapter (2 Kings iv. 42). But this case was an exception, for the reasons just adverted to.

There are occasions, such as happened in connexion with the labours of the apostle Paul, when what, under other and ordinary circumstances, would be only equitable and appropriate, had better be waived, rather than insisted upon as a right, that the truth be not evil spoken of; that no opportunity be afforded to sceptics, or scoffers, or eagerly-looking fault-finders, for justifying their hostility and hatred to the religion of Christ. Especially should there be care taken in dealing with rich men, who should be practically taught, both by ministers and private Christians, that there is disinterestedness among the servants of God, and that it is not theirs but they who are sought, in any advances that may be made towards them, ostensibly and really for their spiritual benefit. Prejudice and suspicion will then be disarmed. It is a most contemptible sight to see the assiduous court which is some-

times paid to men of wealth, by smooth-tongued flatterers, in the garb of the servants of Christ; whose only object and care are to enrich themselves at the expense of their victims, for whom they pretend a most profound respect, but whom in their hearts they despise and contemn, except as tools by which they may work out their own selfish ends. Such exhibitions as these, which, alas! are not very rare, have done immense harm to the cause of Christ; and led many, unjustly, to place all ministers and Christians in the same list with these Jesuitical deceivers, and to pronounce religion to be only a hypocritical and money-getting system.

After this refusal, on the part of Elisha, to receive the present of Naaman, there follows the preference of a singular request; "And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." This is evidently designed by the Syrian to be an expression of further devotedness and homage to God. He did not think, when he had recognized the claims of God by an avowal in words, and those of his servant

by the offer of a costly present, that he was thereby exempted from any further exhibition of acknowledgment to the Master; on the contrary, his desire was perpetually to recognise the claims of the latter upon his obedience and worship. But his request, referring to the mode by which his homage was to be manifested, was very singular. There is a variety of opinions maintained in relation to the nature of this request. The general impression is, that he designed, with the earth which he wished to bear away from Samaria, to erect an altar to the true God, when he returned to Syria. He probably thought, that there was a peculiar sanctity attaching itself to the soil of a country over which the especial protection of Jehovah extended, and where such extraordinary transactions had taken place; and that this sanctity would cleave to the altar which he meant to rear, formed of the earth borne from that land. He had probably heard of the command of God (Exod. xx. 24), and the prohibition against erecting an altar of hewn stone, and wished scrupulously to obey the injunction.

Among other explanations given, are one or two to which I advert, because of the singularity of the customs to which they refer.

people admitted this as a truth. He feared, therefore, lest a misconstruction of this act of attendance on his master should take place, and he be prematurely condemned; and so before-hand he adverts to and explains the matter, and entreats a favourable judgment; one not according to the appearance of things, but according to the confession of faith which, in the 15th verse, he had recently made before his servants and the prophet.

This Rimmon was the national god of the Syrians. Most probably it was the sun that was worshipped under that name; and to this luminary the king and his subjects paid their homage. Naaman knew well the superstitious character of prince and people, and anticipated that, notwithstanding the extraordinary miracle which had been wrought upon him, and of which he would be a living and indisputable witness, they would still cleave to their old delusions. He had learned that "an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one;" and could therefore go into the temple of Rimmon as into any other edifice, without cherishing those superstitious notions that affected the minds of others. Yet still he felt there was something not exactly in

accordance with the belief of the one living and true God, in even entering such a place, though it were but as an attendant upon the king, and not as a worshipper of the god, and though his bowing down was not before the idol, but to suit the posture of his master when he bent before Rimmon. It would have been a noble act of moral heroism, far excelling his military exploits of other days, if he had at once resolved to take his stand on the high ground of stern religious principle, and refused, at all costs and hazards, to attend the king on the occasion referred to. But he was, it appears, too young a convert to be ready to brave the consequences of immediately and directly declining to accompany his master; not yet established enough to assume and maintain the lofty position of refusing, even in the most remote and indirect manner, to recognize a falsity, or give countenance to imposture. On this subject there appears to have been no small struggle in his mind, over which, with almost bewildering rapidity, a multitude of new and startling thoughts had rushed, and left him with imperfect conception of some duties, which experience and time would teach him to estimate more correctly.

Elisha appears to have answered Naaman as he desired; "And he said to him, Go in peace." If we do not misunderstand these words of the prophet, they certainly imply, that neither he nor his divine Master would misconstrue the transaction, to which the Syrian refers with so much apprehension. Doubtless, Elisha knew the character of the man with whom he had to deal; and, sensible of the fact that a vast and important moral transformation had already been effected, he trusted that fresh light from above, and the workings of thought and experimental religion in the heart, would at length set him free from the remaining excrescences of his old character, and lead him utterly to abstain from that which might bear the aspect of a compromise with truth and righteousness. All will perceive that Elisha does not deal with this case as Paul, centuries afterwards, did with the converts at Corinth. A very different state of things existed then, justificatory of the position the apostle assumed. Elisha appears to have acted upon the principle which the Saviour enunciated to the Pharisees, when they complained to him that his disciples fasted not. "Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn,

as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast. No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment; for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles; else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved."* That is, he did not lay upon the new converts more than they were able to bear, lest they should be disheartened, and give up their profession. Their prejudices and mistakes were not removed in an hour, but by degrees. In rooting out the tares, care must be taken lest the young wheat be plucked up with them. Thus, I apprehend, Elisha thought and dealt with Naaman.

One of the first impulses of a truly grateful heart,—that receives from God the inestimable favour of deliverance from the terrible curse of sin, which was crushing the spirit, and depriving it of peace,—is to ask, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits

* Matt. ix. 15—17.

toward me?" This should be, and most probably ever will be, the first inquiry. But there will, not unnaturally, be also felt a lively gratitude towards any agent God may have employed in effectuating that deliverance; and this gratitude will seek occasions to display itself; not, it may be, in the presentation of costly offerings, but in cherishing and exhibiting affectionate remembrances of the part he has taken in the soul's emancipation, and "esteeming him very highly in love for his work's sake." One of the holiest, strongest, and most endearing ties, that bind men together on earth, is that which subsists between the minister of the gospel and those he has been honoured to instruct and convince, to save from despair and bring to Christ. The language of Paul in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, has had many reiterations since his day, as expressive of the ardent mutual attachment of pastor and flock. Sometimes there are seasons, when the sense of obligation on the part of the latter has led them to minister, in an especial manner, to the temporal wants of the servants of Christ; which, under circumstances easily conceived and often existing, are

no more than just; while they are equally honourable and delightful to both parties. Paul, whom no man can suspect of the love of gold, and who seems to have gone to the very extreme of waiving his undoubted rights, thus addresses the Philippians who had generously ministered to his necessities, "Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now, ye Philippians, know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God."

But the obligation to God is infinitely greater than that under which it is possible for one man to be laid to another; and the desire of the truly converted heart will be so to act, that God and man may see how intense is the gratitude it cherishes, and how entire the de-

votedness it feels it ought to display towards Him. When men become personally conscious of a great work being wrought in them, by a power from without, as mysterious as it is certain, as gracious as it is inexplicable; when a load of anxious thought is removed from their heart, by some revelation of the grace of a forgiving God; when there is not only a transformation of views, and a change of sentiments, but the possession of a peace that never existed before; a calm and holy joy which the soul, up to this time, had never previously known; then they exclaim, readily and exultingly, "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but the God of Israel, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has reconciled the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Though thou wast angry with me, yet thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Thou hast renewed me in the spirit of my mind; and now, with these renewed powers, I yield myself to thee."

"Lord, I am thine, for ever thine,
Purchas'd and sav'd by blood divine.
With full consent thine I would be,
And own thy sov'reign right in me.

Thee, my new Master now I call,
And consecrate to thee my all:
Lord, let me live and die to thee,
Be thine through all eternity."

Henceforth the believer will offer neither burnt offerings nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord. God will have the highest place in his heart, and all other objects of affection will occupy a subordinate position. He feels he is no longer his own, to confer his love upon whom he pleases, and devote his powers to personal ends—to self-aggrandizement. He recognizes the supreme and sole right of God to reign over him. His life will be regulated by a desire to do his will, because of the conviction of its perfect harmony with all that is just and true, and beneficial to the best interests of man. Secretly, he and his divine Master will hold fellowship with each other, in hours when something of the ineffable bliss of heaven is revealed on earth; while before the world there will be a manly avowal of his sentiments, as those which are to form the groundwork of his moral character, the vital principles that are to regulate him in all the relations of life. There will be an assumption of a profession of religion, in an identification

with the people of God, and association with them in all the high and holy enterprises with which the present day is rife, and which are redounding to the glory of God, and making him known to the ends of the earth.

It may often happen to the believer to be placed in a very difficult position; not one of his own seeking, but which has resulted from a combination of circumstances over which he had no control. He may not be his own master; and in a dependent position, as the servant or assistant of others, he is often constrained to meet with those he would rather shun, and take a part in transactions he would rather avoid. These may be equivocal; and he is conscious that he is nearing dangerous ground. He feels the responsibility that rests upon him, as a professed friend of Christ and truth, to carry out his principles before all men. He is anxious that there should be no compromise of his Christian character; most desirous that his divine Master should not be dishonoured, and in all that pertains to him personally is determined that he shall not be. But how to carry out the resolve is with him a most difficult matter. To please God, he must

often dare the displeasure of men. In these days of sharp competition in business, it is to be feared that the most scrupulous veracity is not always maintained by some; falsehood is often clothed in the garb of truth, and deception practised upon the public, largely and systematically. How can a man with clean hands, and a clear conscience, mix himself up with this state of things? How dare he, at the bidding of any employer under heaven, deliberately deceive a customer, and coolly utter a lie? If he fear God, he must refuse to obey man. Apart from the peril to which such employers are exposed, who train men to deceive, and who may naturally expect that the experiment will at the first favourable opportunity be tried upon themselves, the thing is such a glaring insult to God that that system can never in the long run be successful. But where and while it is maintained, many an honest mind, I doubt not, is pained and troubled, and can see no way of escape, but by an abandonment of such service. I could never counsel any other line of action. That is the right course to pursue, though it may involve no small amount of sacrifice. From my very soul I pity those thus fixed. I have known some visit ministers, in

the utmost distress of mind because of this state of things; who, finding themselves thus unhappily placed, have been constrained to resign their situations, and forego the very means of a livelihood, because they could not, under such circumstances, maintain an unsullied conscience. I trust and would fain believe, for the honour of our common humanity, and of that English honesty, which is said among our continental neighbours to be proverbial, that this state of things is very limited in its operations; and that the sterling principles of English truthfulness will speedily lead to its utter extinction.

But let our sympathy go forth towards those who, in the position just indicated, or in some other, equally trying to principle, are endeavouring to "exercise themselves to have a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men." Often from amid the ungodly, goes there up from an anxious Christian man, whose heart is sensible of its weakness and exposure to temptation, a cry for wisdom and grace, to maintain the high position, to which, as a believer in the truth, he is summoned; to "walk worthy his high vocation." It is not unlikely that some of those most faithful to truth and

righteousness are the subjects of animadversion, when they ought to receive sympathy and pity; because they and their position are misunderstood; while those who are thus blamed may have the testimony of their own consciences, "that, in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have had their conversation in the world;" and reflect with hallowed comfort on the words of the apostle John, "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God." If the difficulties which beset such persons continue, and their Christian character is likely to be injured thereby, I firmly believe that God will open a way for such to escape from the toils that are weaving around them, if, in accordance with his own instruction, "by prayer and supplication they let their requests be made known unto God."

Probably there are many of those who continually listen to the truth, but by whom no profession of that truth has been made before men; who have, nevertheless, felt their obligations to a God of mercy; who, as at times they have paused over the wondrous

record of the history of Jesus, and heard from the pulpit the exposition of the unparalleled compassion of God, and his costly interposition on their behalf, have heard whispers from within inciting the soul to make a life-acknowledgment. Those whispers are even now heard; "the still small voice," soft and gentle, is now penetrating the heart with its solemn tones, and constraining it to upbraid itself for its failures, in carrying out long-cherished and solemn convictions. Not one word has it to utter in its own defence; it stands silent and self-condemned. It may have acknowledged God's claims in words; it has not yet done so in actions. Should not that now be done?

Naaman was grateful for the deliverance wrought for him from a bodily disease, and readily offered himself and his substance to God and his servant, as a humble expression of thankfulness for the divine mercy which had been exhibited towards him. But what was this, compared with that deliverance which has been effected by the intervention of the Son of God, by the lavish appropriation of the riches of divine grace; deliverance from degradation, sorrow, alienation from God, and eternal death, and the introduction to light, life, honour, joy,

heaven! The consequences of this interposition terminate not with the present life, but extend forward through the unceasing ages of an ever-increasing and ineffable felicity. What language can we employ that will adequately express the greatness of the divine goodness towards us? Where shall we find the gifts, with which to acknowledge the boon, that will in any way be proportioned to its magnitude, or answer to the nature and extent of our obligations? What is the character and extent of the affection we ought to cherish? What is the kind of service we ought to render, that shall show a proper appreciation of the gracious dealings of God? He tells us, in reply, that nothing will please him but the consecration of ourselves to his service; the loving, child-like obedience of a grateful heart. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams."

The combined adorations of heaven and earth, perfected and eternal, flowing towards the throne of God in a full and ceaseless tide, would be too feeble and inexpressive; they would never sufficiently show the magnitude of divine mercy, and never exhaust the theme of the love of God, for—

"O! Eternity's too short
To utter all his praise."

The presentation of "the cattle upon a thousand hills," rich gems from the mine, or gold from the mountain, will never suffice as an acknowledgment.

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

The cheerful devotion of the renewed powers of man to the service of God, both in this life and the future,—here among men, and yonder in the temple of heaven—would be but a poor and inadequate return; leave the debt for ever unpaid; the balance eternally against the creature, and in favour of the Creator. The heart's warmest glow of loving affection that never diminished nor changed, but—as in another world will be the case—that deepened in its intensity, and multiplied its forms of expression continually, will never repay our obligations.

If this be true, then God asks not too much in demanding the gift of the heart and the confession of the lip; the service of the life, and the consecration of that substance, with

which he may have endowed us, to the promotion of his cause in the earth. If eternity be too short to testify to all his grace, then surely the limited space of mortal existence is not too long to serve him! Yet many have never even begun that service, though their shadows are lengthening, and their day declining. They have not even devoted small fragmentary portions of their life to him. They have lived without God in the world; and yet that world is filled with touching and eloquent memorials of his sleepless love and tender care, in the enjoyment of which they, in common with the millions of the human family, have been daily and hourly blessed. Perhaps they design at some future period to attend to the claims of God; of course making their calculations as if no such contingencies as mental incapacity to do so, or the occurrence of an unexpected death, were likely to ensue; but as if they were sure to enjoy an exemption from all the ills that affect others, and were certain of life being continued to any term they pleased. But even if that were true, is it honourable to God, or reputable to men, to contemplate giving him only the failing powers of existence? to turn towards him when they

cannot turn to any one else? to cling to him because the world forsakes them? to offer the dregs of existence to Jehovah, when the cup of life has been well nigh drained in honour of other gods? to bring the last moments of life, —the small atoms of the diamond-dust of time, which are all that remain, when the bag has been well shaken of the more precious jewels of months and years, that have been lavishly devoted to the service of Satan, and to the dishonour of God,—and to offer these! Can any of you calmly reflect on this, and persevere in a course of utter neglect of the calls of your Maker and Judge? Can *you* do it, "before whose eyes Christ has been evidently set forth crucified," and before whose souls' vision from time to time have flashed the indescribable glories of a blissful heaven, as the Spirit of Truth unveiled the better land, while the minister of the gospel was inviting men to secure and partake of its joys? May not you expect that the very stones of the street would find a voice to upbraid you, if God has to wait another hour for the proffer of your service? Oh! let all press forward eagerly to the footstool of God; and as your hearts thrill under the consciousness of his infinite goodness, exclaim,—

"In vain our mortal voices try,
To speak compassion so divine:
Had we a thousand hearts to give,
A thousand hearts should all be thine."

Whether you are ready to recognize the fact or not, it is true, that you are bought with a price, and are therefore bound "to glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's." Ponder this, and remember it is not a service which you may if you please refuse, but a settled and positive duty, to which the voice of Jehovah imperatively calls you, and from which no unwillingness whatever can excuse you. You are environed by obligations from which no power in heaven, or earth, or hell, can free you. You are God's creature, and as such you cannot escape the essential obligations which spring out of this relationship. God says, "Behold, all souls are mine;" and in laying claim to them, he lays claim to all that belongs to them. Will you now recognize that claim, and,—not merely because "the Spirit of God hath made you, and the breath of the Almighty hath given you life," but because the Son of God has redeemed you, and that at an immense price,—yield to him "soul and life and all?"

LECTURE VI.

SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES; OR, GEHAZI, A LIAR AND A LEPER.

2 KINGS v. 20—27.

THIS episode, relating to Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, is a very painful and melancholy close to an otherwise instructive and interesting history. It is introduced here because it is associated with the closing actions and words of Naaman, and because of the salutary though terrible lessons it teaches. The first verse of this chapter and the last both speak of a leper, but how appallingly different are the respective positions of the two men, where the narrative leaves them! As we float along the stream of history, the last look we gain of Naaman, who appeared before us in the early part of this chapter shaded by the clouds of sorrow, shows him to us restored and happy; the sunshine of goodness and mercy streaming around him with a bright and joyous radiance. The last glimpse we get of Gehazi is that of an outcast,

with the mark of God's finger upon him—fleeing from the society of men, who would not suffer him to remain amongst them, to nurse in solitude and misery the bitter remembrances of his consummate folly, and to bewail his severely, though justly, punished guilt. The former case is presented to our notice, that we may perceive the greatness of the divine mercy, and rejoice in both the bodily and spiritual cure which was wrought for Naaman; the latter, that we may see the abhorrence of God against sin, and be warned to avoid the transgressions which here meet with such a terrible curse. Naaman, so far as we know, was not suffering for any sin of his own, but probably had inherited the disease from his parents,—as it is well known to be hereditary in families; and our sympathy with him under the dire calamity is therefore more readily excited, and our gratitude and pleasure are greater, when, through the miraculous interposition of God, he is freed from his leprosy. Gehazi's case is represented as the direct infliction of a holy God, in a spirit of righteous judgment, because of the sins just before committed. So that there was accompanying the disgrace and serious inconvenience, which attached them-

selves to the disease, the sharper pang and deeper degradation, which arose from the conviction that he was suffering under the indignant curse of an offended God.

We shall find that the servant of the prophet had more than one guilty propensity chargeable upon him. In the previous chapter he is first introduced to us, in connexion with the interesting circumstances related of the Shunammite woman, towards whom however there was one act of his that did not indicate a kind and sympathizing heart. His character seems not at first to have been fully perceived by the prophet; put the prophet's Master knew Gehazi; and when the child of the Shunammite lay on the couch of death, and Elisha sent his servant to place his staff on his face, with the hope that he might be restored, no return to life followed. God thus silently testified against the unworthy servant; and refused to work a miracle in connexion with the movements of any such agent.

In the twentieth verse we have his soliloquy, in which the covetousness and irreverence of the man broadly display themselves. "Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the Lord liveth, I will run

after him, and take somewhat of him." He does not appear to have entered into the reasons that influenced the mind of Elisha,—he might not be acquainted with them. But he knew of the refusal; and with his covetous disposition thought the rejection of the present foolish. He looked upon Naaman as a man possessed of great wealth, and considered that a surrender of a small portion of it would not be felt by him; that he could well spare a part of what he had, unasked, originally designed to give to the man who should recover him of his leprosy, and which, considering the nature and worth of the boon that had been conferred upon him, he would not be likely to think too great. He imagined that Elisha had "spared Naaman," had dealt too generously with him, not liking to take aught at his hands; and intimates with an oath—in his mouth the language of blasphemy—that he would not allow him to leave so easily, but would, if he could so arrange it, "take somewhat of him." Thus resolving, his resolution was speedily carried into effect; and he followed after him.

This man was possessed by the demon of covetousness; and we shall see, as we pursue the thread of the narrative, to what mis-

chievous and melancholy results the indulgence of that diabolical spirit led. With a few of those bold strokes which are the characteristic of the highest genius, Milton, in his representation of the infernal powers, graphically depicts the god of wealth :—

"Mammon, the least erected spirit that fell
From heav'n; for ev'n in heav'n his looks and thought
Were always downward bent, admiring more
The riches of heav'n's pavement, trodden gold,
Than aught divine or holy, else enjoyed
In vision beatific."

Scarcely any spirit has ruled more widely or tyrannically over the world, and the results of his reign have been most disastrous. When he assumes the supremacy in any man's heart, every generous and ennobling sentiment dies; the soul shrivels into the smallest conceivable dimensions; all the genial affections wither; the fountains of right feeling dry up; and an icy coldness, a stony-hearted selfishness follows, when "all life dies, and death lives." Paul says that, "they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted

after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Alas! the history of mankind presents millions of the most affecting illustrations of this truth. Injustice the most barefaced, and cruelty the most fearful, have been wrought on a scale of gigantic magnitude, under the influence of this terrible passion. Kings have waded through blood to gratify it; fair and smiling countries have been devastated, the landmarks of ancient kingdoms obliterated, wealthy and populous cities have been overturned and pillaged, and sights and scenes have been witnessed at the bare recital of which humanity shudders, to minister to its fierce and never-satisfied cravings. Genius has prostituted its godlike powers in its service; history has been falsified at its bidding; science and skill have meanly bowed down at its golden shrine; and man, the noblest and most erect of God's creatures on earth, has worshipped, with basest adulation, "the least erected spirit that fell from heaven." This sin has stained alike the purple, and the ermine, and the lawn; and men, who by position and office pretend to be, and ought to be, superior to such a low and degrading passion, have cherished the spirit of grasping covetousnes as if

they were entertaining an angel of light, and created in the minds of those not most favourable to them, or the systems with which they were associated, a feeling of unconquerable disgust, and led to the most severe and sweeping charges of hypocrisy and venality, as characteristic of the whole herd, of which these formed a part. Names, dear to philosophy and literature, are enumerated among those who sold truth and justice for a bribe; a bar sinister is introduced into an otherwise fair moral escutcheon, and the legend that surrounds it is, "Lord, what is man? He heapeth up riches and knoweth not who shall gather them." This is no fanciful picture: these are the words of truth and soberness.

When Naaman saw the servant of the prophet following him, without waiting until he came up, he lighted down from his chariot, and went back to meet him, and said, "Is all well?" How different the spirit now displayed from that which a few hours before had been exhibited! Then, he expected the prophet to come forth to him; now, without dreaming that he was performing any act of condescension, he goes forth to meet the prophet's servant, appa-

rently solicitous to knew if any evil had befallen the man who had been to him so invaluable a friend. His mind, however, was speedily relieved on that matter. He said, "All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments." Here is a cleverly-introduced lie, the offspring of the spirit of covetousness; one sin usually being the parent of another. The man who is resolved by some means or other to obtain money, who "*will* be rich," rarely scruples at a falsehood, if he thinks he can thereby the more easily and effectually compass his object. The tone of moral feeling in a man must be sadly lowered, when he can, with such intense eagerness and absorption of mind, seek the gratification of this low passion for money; and when once that takes possession of the soul, it becomes a prey to whatever temptation presents itself, that appears likely to minister to the indulgence of the darling lust.

This falsehood of Gehazi was ingeniously framed. He did not ask any thing at the hands of Naaman for the prophet himself; that

would have been too transparent a deception, which the Syrian captain, after the direct and solemn refusal of Elisha, could not have failed to detect; and yet Gehazi could not expect to succeed, unless the application appeared to emanate from the prophet. He asks a gift, therefore, in the name of his master, but for the use of others; and those belonging to a class in whom the newly-awakened convert might be likely to feel an interest—"the sons of the prophets"—as it was from a prophet he had recently received the precious boon in which he was exulting.

In our days it is no uncommon thing for impostors to practise similar arts upon those who have won a name for Christian benevolence; who, ever ready to lend a helping hand to institutions that seek the temporal or eternal welfare of the people, are made the victims of designing men and women—for both sexes are engaged in this infamous practice—who, under the guise of agents and collectors, solicit donations on their behalf, but which, as may easily be conjectured, never find their way to the objects for which they are professedly asked and given.

Naaman, not doubting the truth of Gehazi's statement, and regarding the message as one

actually sent to him by the prophet, was more generous than the man who was deceiving him had anticipated or desired. "And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents;"—most probably doubling the solicited gift because he heard that there were two sons of the prophets who were to be assisted. Gehazi appears to have hesitated to take the two from Naaman; but it is said, "he urged him." We can hardly believe that a feeling of compunction for the cheat he was practising upon the Syrian led him thus to hesitate, but rather that he was afraid he would not be able to secrete so large a portion of silver, or even to carry it home—for each talent weighed upwards of a hundred pounds. However, his objections were overruled, when Naaman "bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his own servants; and they bear them before him." Thus far Gehazi had succeeded beyond his expectations. But, as we shall see, the triumphing of the wicked is short.

It is at this stage of the narrative that we lose sight of Naaman, whose last act was one of generous liberality, wrought in a cheerful and willing spirit; an act, as he thought, ac-

ceptable and gratifying to one whom he desired to honour, and which would no doubt be duly appreciated by the prophet, even while he mourned over the deception which had led to its performance. Naaman returned home, an object of the deepest interest to his family and friends, and royal master, as the subject of an indisputable and gracious miracle. Doubtless many would listen with admiration and surprise as he related the incidents connected with his memorable journey, the singular instructions given to him by the prophet, and the happy results of his obedience when the power of Jehovah was put forth to restore him to health; and perhaps more than one might be ready with himself to acknowledge, "There is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." The moral as well as physical change that had taken place could not but be visible to those who came into daily intercourse with him; while from his house, as from an illuminated centre, would probably radiate streams of light, in which the character and claims of the true God would be set before men, who were immersed in a thick and perilous darkness.

So now a converted man is ever an object of the deepest interest, not only to the children of

light, in heaven and earth, but even to ungodly friends, when they are made cognisant of the transformation that has taken place; and though they may neither know anything of the means by which it has been wrought, nor be acquainted with the real nature of the change itself, still they are aware that it is not the same man that is now before them. Something they cannot perfectly comprehend has occurred; and though they may outwardly ridicule and sneer at the convert, yet, could their hearts be read, it would be found that even they, with all their irreligion and indifference, have been startled at the sight of an effect, with which their heart whispers something more than mortal power has had to do.

We have now to follow the prophet's servant, as he returns to his master's house, exulting in the spoil he has gained, by means of what he probably esteemed a clever stratagem. "And when Gehazi came to the tower," or hill, as the word should be rendered, on which the prophet's house stood, he relieved the servants of Naaman from their burdens, "took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house;" secreting his booty as carefully as possible from the observation of his master and

others. His scheme appeared to be perfectly successful; and he hoped now to be able to revel in the secure possession of his ill-gotten treasure. At present, however, he must forego the contemplation of it, delightful as that would be; for no sight to the covetous is more pleasant or enchanting than that of their hoarded wealth. The eye loves to see, and the hand to grasp it. The touch is thrilling to them, and the glance inspiriting! Does not the soul shrink with invincible loathing from such wretched creatures as can make shining metal or bank-notes the almost sole companions of their life, and who are utterly dead to a higher and nobler order of existence? Beware of covetousness, for it, almost more than anything else, robs the soul of its spirituality, and bestializes it. Let the young flee from this vile spirit as from a serpent.

Lest any suspicion should attach itself to him because of his lengthened absence, "he went in and stood before his master,"—stood in his usual posture of a servant, as if nothing had happened; assuming the aspect of a man innocent of any deceit. "And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" The nature of the question must have been start-

ling to the guilty soul of the prophet's servant; for it seemed to indicate more knowledge of his movements than he thought could possibly be possessed, and to come almost at once to the very inquiry he dreaded to hear, and hoped to avoid. His master had evidently known of his going out and returning; still he did not think that he knew more than that simple fact; and so, putting a bold face upon the business, he replied, "Thy servant went no whither"—"went neither hither nor thither," as the margin reads; that is, had no specific object in going out, went in no particular direction. Here was another falsehood, the natural and legitimate offspring of the former. The habit of lying becomes stronger on every occasion of its exercise. It is one of the vilest and most diabolical of sins. It has a parentage, the bare mention of which should make every one shrink from having aught to do with it. Satan is represented as that parent, "who abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."* So spake One who was himself emphatically "THE TRUTH."

* John viii. 44.

But Gehazi speedily finds his falsehood fail of its object. The prophet puts another question to him, which must have startled and terrified him still more. "And he said to him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned from his chariot to meet thee?" What! had all been revealed to the eyes of Elisha? Had he, in the exercise of that mysterious power, with which as the prophet of God he was endowed, made himself acquainted with the whole transaction? Of some of its minute details he was evidently aware, by his distinct reference to them; and that countenanced the supposition that he knew all. So that that which Gehazi thought he had accomplished so secretly was no secret at all! It was proclaimed as upon the house-top. Well might he stand silent and confused, at this unexpected, and to him disreputable, discovery. So completely does he appear to have been paralyzed, as much perhaps by the accusations of his own conscience, as by the upbraidings of the prophet, that he attempted not one word of self-exculpation. No doubt he had often read or heard from the book of the law, the solemn warning addressed to men like him, "Be sure your sin will find you out;" and here was a

fearful illustration of its truth in his own case, and to his indescribable confusion.

Elisha proceeds to remonstrate with him on account of the dishonour likely to accrue to the God of Israel, and to the cause of true religion, through this deceitful transaction; because it might seem as if, after all, the refusal of the prophet was feigned—a mere pretence—and the disinterestedness of the whole affair relating to Naaman's recovery, which Elisha was most anxious to keep above suspicion, might be strongly questioned. "Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive-yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants?" Living, as they did, at a period of almost universal defection from the true God, the people careful only for the things of the present life, it was of immense importance that the prophet and those connected with him should show their superiority to the prevalent tastes and pursuits. Besides, at that time of unsettledness and change, it was folly to display a great desire for what might very speedily be snatched from their grasp; what might only serve as a temptation to men to assail them, that they might gain possession thereof for themselves.

But the covetousness and the falsehood were the great crimes against which the reprobation of Heaven was to be recorded, in the terrible judgment that was about to be inflicted upon him. The last words of Elisha, addressed to his guilty servant, must have fallen as the knell of death upon his soul: "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever." A fearful punishment! but there had been a fearful transgression. Before he left the presence of the prophet the curse had been wrought upon him; the hand of God had smitten him. The character of his sin—greater in the servant of a prophet than in that of an ordinary person—was now read as if written in lurid flames; while its terrible consequences clave to him and his posterity for ever. Let us hope that the "destruction of the flesh resulted in the salvation of the spirit;" and that in the hours of silence and meditation to which he was doomed, there would come the remembrance of some lessons of wisdom, and words of mercy and forgiveness, which had fallen from his master's lips, and which should be like balm upon his wounded and bleeding heart; and lead him as a penitent sinner to sue for pardon from that God whom he had so

grievously offended, but to whom the truly sorrowful never sought in vain.

In reading this narrative, two or three things prominently suggest themselves to our notice.

First. Association with the people of God does not necessarily make us like them, though it has that tendency. It is possible to be a servant, aye a son, or near relative of the friends of Christ, and yet so to nourish in the heart "the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life," that they shall be ready on the first occasion to burst forth into terrible fury, and lead to the perpetration of immense evils. A more sad and melancholy spectacle cannot be conceived, than when those who consort habitually with the wise and good, instead of imitating the excellencies that are daily developed before them, exhibit, as is sometimes the case, some of the very worst features of depraved humanity. Such is the general impression of the real value and power of right principles, that it is expected they should be influential for good upon those who daily witness their living embodiment; and a certain degree of disappointment is felt, if that expectation is not realized. We anticipate that he that walketh with wise men will be

wise; and if folly presents itself in such an one it is the more to be marvelled at. Yet he who takes not into account the innate tendencies of the human heart towards evil, in preference to good, will certainly not form a just estimate of cases like this we have just been considering. They may and do sadden, but they should not surprise us.

Secondly. We are here emphatically taught that one sin is sure to lead to another; covetousness to falsehood—falsehood to dissimulation and concealment, and these to open falsehood again. What Solomon says of the beginning of strife is very true of the commission of any sin,—"It is as when one letteth out water;" where its effects will end no one can tell. "One may know the beginnings of sin," says Bunyan, "but who can bound the issues thereof?" The only safe method of action is to oppose every temptation to sin at the outset. Restrain the covetous eye from wandering at the first, and the lustful heart from desiring; crush the viperous brood of evil inclinations in the shell, if you would keep them from fastening on the soul. Let him who utters a lie remember that he is raising a spirit which he will be unable to lay; a spirit

that will one day confront him—it may be before man, certainly before the tribunal of God —and with its testimony cover him with confusion and shame. Yes, the very lies which he thought he had made his servants will turn out to be most terrible masters. The arrow, that with its poisoned fangs will most deeply pierce his heart, will be seen to be one his own hands had fashioned and winged. When his moral nature is thoroughly degraded, transformed into a hideous thing by his own folly, Acteon-like, he will be set upon by his own dogs.

Gehazi's sin extended in its consequences to his posterity. Thus He had ordained, "who visits the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." So now, often, the results of folly and crime flow on in an uninterrupted stream to remote periods, and entail the most mischievous consequences upon the unhappy descendants of those who, in the gratification of their own lustful passions and wayward wills, are utterly regardless of all the laws that bind them to their kindred and their God. Man can hardly by any possibility commit sin that shall not injuriously affect others as well as himself; such and so many are the points of contact with universal

humanity. This should never be forgotten. It might at times restrain from the sinful act which thoughtless wickedness was about to perform.

> "Vice in her high career might stand appalled,
> And heedless, rambling impulse learn to think."

Thirdly. We see that sin is sure to meet with its reward. It does not always overtake men here; and rarely as rapidly as in the case of Gehazi. "Some men's sins are open before hand, going before to judgment, and some men they follow after;" but all are sure, one day or other, if unrepented of, to bring about a fearful retribution. This is the law of the King. Gehazi found his guilt followed by its punishment almost as closely as the thunder peal follows the lightning flash; the penalty seemed to accompany the offence as the shadow the substance. As he walked apart from men, ever carrying about with him, like the first murderer, the mark of the finger of an offended God, he presented a living and loathsome warning to others, to be careful how they venture to brave the divine vengeance. His leprous form ever proclaimed that it was "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the

living God," and that "none could stand in his sight, when once he was angry."

All sin, open or secret, refined or vulgar, connived at or generally reprobated,—we re-repeat, will meet with a terrible retribution, here or hereafter. "God has appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in right-eousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained." Every deed, every thought, every word, will then be dragged to light; long forgotten evil things,—forgotten by men, but vividly remembered by God,—will be brought before their minds; and memory, kindled into unwonted activity, will make men recall and recognise their own moral offspring. What a terrible progeny will then assert their claims to parental acknowledgment! What a horror of agony will creep over the soul as it sees grouping around it the myriad transgressions which it will have to own! The secret sin, so carefully kept from the knowledge of others, pointed out as by a sunbeam; those words of anger, and actions of folly and petulance, which it would not believe to have any thing morally wrong attaching to them, all arrayed as articles of condemnation against it. Then all things will be stripped of the disguise they have worn

among men, and stand in their real hues and proportions before God and all worlds. If, therefore, before that day the leprosy of man's guilt be not removed; if the precious blood of Christ has not been applied to his soul to purify it; if the fatal spot be found upon him then, —and though he may have skilfully contrived to hide it from observation while passing through life, it will *then* be visible,—the consequences are inevitable; ruin must ensue. Nothing can avert it. No wonder that then the guilty and trembling souls of men call "to the mountains and rocks to fall on them, and hide them from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." But nothing will avail to mitigate or turn aside the curse. The consuming fires of the last great and terrible day of the Lord have no purifying virtue in them, to rid the soul of the evils that then are found remaining unremoved, unforgiven. Its mantle of character will cleave to it as the robe of Hercules; but, unlike his, though it will burn continually, it will never be utterly consumed. "The Lord grant that you may find mercy of the Lord in that day." But it can only be ensured by a cordial, and let me add, an immediate agree-

ment with God's plan of salvation, through Jesus Christ.

In bringing these lectures to a conclusion, I may observe, that I have endeavoured to make this interesting narrative the vehicle for the enunciation of infinitely important truths, relating to the soul and its everlasting welfare. I have striven, as well as I have been able, without any exaggeration of the minute, or far-fetchedness of analogy, to draw forth those spiritual suggestions which appear to me to have naturally unfolded themselves in the several points of the narrative. But the main object of these lectures will be unaccomplished, if they have not wrought conviction in your souls that sin is a deadlier leprosy affecting them than any malady which makes the body its victim; —if you have not learned that there is a Prophet,—one sent direct from God, endowed with miraculous powers, mercifully exercised,—who can, if he will, recover you of that leprosy, and who says in answer to the cry of the eager earnest heart, "Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean," "I WILL; be thou clean;" and if you have not been led to resolve to seek his aid, not as Naaman did, with costly gifts, for

he invites you to come "without money and without price," but with the one gift of the heart, the offer of the service and homage of all its affections. If you have not seen that human schemes of salvation avail nothing,—nay, are worse than nothing, and that none but the Son of God has the power or the willingness to deliver you; that no waters of self-purification, no penances, or pilgrimages, deeds, or words, or tears, can be of any avail, but that simple compliance with the words of Christ will be followed by life; and if you have not gone and sought his aid, tested the power of the Saviour to deliver, and the efficacy of his blood to cleanse, and finding that, have cheerfully given your heart to him for ever,—these lectures have been delivered in vain. But we hope "better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." See to it that our hope make us not ashamed; but that we realize the fruition thereof, in being permitted to gather in here a glorious harvest of souls for God; the young and the old, youths and maidens, devoting themselves to the service of the Divine Master.

In closing these special exercises, my mind not unnaturally, for a moment, dwells on the fact,

that there have been drawn to this sanctuary some who were never here before; some, who, perhaps, after this service, may never enter the place again. Not that I imagine you will make a fixed resolution to do so, probably far otherwise; but the waves of the ocean of time, as they roll on in their ceaseless course, may bear you away from this exact point of the shore, where, for a tide or two, you have rested, and it is not, therefore, an improbable thing that your feet may never pass this threshold again. Think you that our temporary intercourse, in the relation of the teacher and the taught, involves no responsibility on either side? that, because that intercourse has been brief, and at intervals, you are under no obligations to be wiser and better, and we have no right to look for the traces of results upon your minds now, or in your future history; no warrant for believing there will be a record, and a distinct one too, of all these religious services, in the book of the Most High? You have perhaps watched a snow-flake fall silently on a river, and melt away,—"a moment seen, then gone for ever;" a drop of rain shaken from a passing cloud into the bosom of the great deep, to be no more discovered, or at least distinguished by mortal eyes.

Think you that this little episode in your moral and spiritual history—your visit to this sanctuary, and your attention for a season to the truths proclaimed—will be like the snow-flake and the rain-drop, lost in the great gulf-stream of human life? Think you that these services will be utterly forgotten, and leave not anywhere a trace of their existence; that they will involve you in no solemn responsibility; that you will have no account to render for them; that they will make little or no difference in your spiritual state? Be not deceived. It is not so. The voice that now falls on your ear may, when its utterances cease to vibrate, be to you as that of one departed, and be remembered in after days only as a voice in a dream of the night; yet amid the hush of attendant worlds, gathered around God's throne at the final judgment, you must hear it again; for its owner will stand by your side, as the great Judge demands an account of your stewardship! How can that be fully and appropriately rendered, without a reference to these services, as well as to every other in which you have taken a part, where the words of truth and the invitations of mercy were floating around you, and heaven and earth were beseeching you to be reconciled to God?

Remember, brethren, we shall meet then, if we stand face to face no more with each other in the daily walks of life. *How* shall we meet? With triumph or regret? With a mutually joyful welcome, or as those who know that the word spoken has not proved a savour of life unto life, but of death unto death? Would God all men could be brought to see that every visit to the sanctuary is an occasion of vital importance, tending either to heighten their future felicity, or add another bitter drop to the cup of interminable and hopeless sorrow!

Perhaps there are not a few here to-night, on whose quickened souls the truth has been slowly and gradually dawning. You have listened of late with more interest and attention to the words of life, which the minister of the gospel has from time to time proclaimed in your hearing. This hour there may have been new impressions mingling with old, and producing a commotion in your soul greater than you care that others should know. This night may be a solemn period in your history, a crisis of your spiritual being; a time to pause, and reconnoitre your position, and consider your prospects. In such a survey others besides

yourselves take a lively interest, and in the results of that survey feel no small concern. There are more here, to witness the transactions in which you are now engaged than you suppose. The invisible world interweaves with the visible—the spiritual with the physical; a great cloud of holy witnesses is present; and with them "spiritual wickednesses in high places." The adversary who has held you in adamantine bonds so long is here, watching with eager eye the effects produced on your mind by what you have heard. He has seen, with rage, the lightning flash of truth rive many links of that chain with which he has manacled you; and though he holds you yet by the fragments, he fears lest that hold should be lost, and his power over you hopelessly broken. Shall it be so? It remains with you to determine, and Heaven and hell await your decision.

Do you say, "Yes; all is true that has been spoken, and not to be gainsayed; but go thy way, O man of God, for this time, when I have a more convenient season, I will send for thee?" Alas! for your soul! The chain re-unites; the fetters are re-forged, the links multiply; your last state will be, must be, worse than the first. Heaven looks on with sorrow; Satan

exults in his success, and hell will celebrate a jubilee!

But you start, and shrink from such a termination of these services, and exclaim, "Not so; I see, I acknowledge the truth. Its evidence is irresistible; its appeals are all-powerful; its injunctions the dictates of common sense, and obedience to them the way to certain and perfect happiness. I have lived long enough in the vain pursuit of enjoyment, sowing the wind, and reaping the whirlwind. When the spirit has been weary, and oppressed, and sorrowful, I have flown to useless remedies, to mischievous restoratives, that effect no cure; bathing in Abana and Pharpar, and slighting the streams of Israel. I find it is all in vain. 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' Hear me, O God, I yield myself to thee; from this hour I am thine, in heart and life, in person and substance, 'Thy people shall be my people, and their interests mine.'"

See! every fragment of the chain falls. Satan looses his hold! he dares not retain it. God has said of you, "He is mine;" and you stand free, in the possession of "the glorious liberty of the sons of God." Bright spirits weave around you invisible wings as they hear

your avowal, and listen to the solemn words in which you pronounce your consecration to God. Up along the pathway of light flies the welcome intelligence of your decision; and burning seraphs near the throne catch the gladdening sound that tells of conversion and devotion to the service of Christ. Ask you what means that rich burst of holy rapture, that joyous celestial harmony that rolls its waves of glorious music round the eternal throne? The calm clear voice of the Son of God replies, "There is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." In the joy of heaven, though in a fainter song and a feebler strain, the church on earth will gladly and gratefully join.

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